young feminist caucus

the GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM WATCHDOG SERIES

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THE YOUNG FEMINIST CAUCUS

ABOUT

We are navigating a world with deepening inequalities, shrinking civic spaces, the rise of authoritarian regimes, and escalating challenges to human rights, gender equality, and social justice. There is an urgent need for coordinated action among feminist actors around the world to collectively resist these anti-rights and anti-gender actions now more than ever. In this context, multilateral spaces serve as critical sites of engagement where such actions can be born, materialized, and realised. However, they continue to remain exclusionary and limit the participation of young leaders from around the world, especially young feminists, grassroots actors, and those from historically marginalised contexts.

The Young Feminist Caucus (YFC) exists to bridge the critical gap between global multilateral spaces and young feminist leaders globally. YFC prioritises the meaningful participation, leadership, and perspectives of young women, girls and gender-diverse youth, particularly those from the Global South and those facing intersecting forms of marginalisation and exclusion. Fridays For Future MAPA, The YP Foundation, Feminist Manch, Youth Coalition, Tejiendo Pensamiento, and Nalafem co-convene the YFC and led the creation of this publication. The design and illustration of this publication have been done by Maitree Muzumdar.

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FEMINIST मंच

STRENGTHENING FEMINIST INFRASTRUCTURE *in a* TIME OF DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

The last decade has been marked by deepening inequalities, democratic backsliding, intensifying authoritarianism, religious fundamentalisms, militarization, and shrinking civic space. These developments are deeply interconnected with neoliberal economic systems that concentrate wealth, resources, and decision-making power in the hands of states, corporations, and elites while deepening dispossession and precarity across the Global South. This ecosystem is structured to reproduce and protect these unequal power relations.

Feminist movements are under increasing pressure to sustain collective infrastructures, political autonomy, and long-term organising capacity. While institutions increasingly adopted the language of participation and inclusion, these shifts rarely altered the distribution of power, resources, and decision-making authority, which remained concentrated within states, donors, corporations, and multilateral institutions.

Feminist Manch was born in 2022 in India through a Feminist Consultation Methodology and feminist action research process led by young women responding to these conditions. The collective emerged from a recognition that participation frameworks alone could not address unequal power relations. Young feminists require sustained political infrastructure to organise constituencies, build collective analysis, negotiate priorities, and exercise collective bargaining power for gender justice and human rights.

Building autonomous feminist infrastructure therefore became both a political necessity and a strategy for sustaining collective power amid the material and political constraints shaping feminist organizing.

As an autonomous collective, Feminist Manch seeks to strengthen the conditions through which young women, girls, and gender-diverse people, particularly those from structurally marginalized communities, can organize collectively, generate political analysis, and engage governance processes on their own terms. Informality enables autonomy, flexibility, and accountability to movements, while simultaneously exposing the collective to the precarity, invisibility, and resource constraints increasingly shaping feminist organizing.

Feminist Manch approaches knowledge production as a political process that locates expertise within communities themselves and challenges dominant systems that privilege institutional, technical, and elite forms of knowledge over lived experience. Through reflection and analysis, young feminists identify shared patterns of exclusion, articulate collective demands, and build a common political understanding of the systems shaping their lives, strengthening constituency power.

Through consultations, community dialogues, feminist participatory action research, and movement-rooted documentation, hundreds of young people across India have engaged in processes that connect lived experience in repressive contexts to intergenerational analysis, constituency-building, and political action.

These processes have contributed to local and national organizing efforts that strengthen constituency power, deepen collective political analysis, and connect community-based struggles to broader feminist advocacy and movement-building efforts.

As Feminist Manch evolved, its constituency-building and political education work increasingly informed engagement with regional and global decision-making spaces. This included interventions in processes, institutions, and policy architectures through which political priorities, resources, and governance arrangements are negotiated.

As founding members and co-convenors of the Young Feminist Caucus (YFC), Feminist Manch became part of a broader transnational effort to strengthen young feminist organizing across regional and multilateral spaces. Through advocacy coordination, constituency mobilization, political strategy, and coalition-building, the caucus works to strengthen young feminists as an organized political constituency capable of shaping political agendas, contesting exclusionary decision-making structures, and advancing feminist demands across governance processes.

As a member of the Asia-Pacific Civil Society Steering Committee coordinating civil society engagement in the Beijing+30 review process, Feminist Manch contributed to regional mobilization efforts that brought together more than 500 organizations, networks, and movements across 32 countries in the region. As the only informal young feminist-led collective on the Committee, Feminist Manch's role challenged dominant assumptions regarding expertise, legitimacy, representation, and whose knowledge counts within regional policy and governance processes. It raised broader questions about who is recognized as a political actor and how power is exercised within spaces often shaped by states, donors, and large civil society institutions.

The focus of this engagement remained rooted in creating conditions through which grassroots priorities could shape regional Beijing+30 outcomes, influence deliberations at the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and strengthen political accountability to feminist movements, centering structurally marginalized constituencies whose organizing frequently takes place outside formal institutional structures. Through consultations, advocacy coordination, and cross-movement organizing, Feminist Manch and the Steering Committee members contributed to efforts to strengthen the influence of grassroots constituencies within regional decision-making processes and challenge the concentration of agenda-setting power within institutional spaces. The co-design of the Young Feminist Forum and efforts to secure formal decision-making roles for young feminists reflected broader efforts to redistribute influence within regional governance processes and deepen the collective bargaining power of young feminist constituencies.

The same political approach informs Feminist Manch's engagement within broader feminist movement spaces, including as Co-Convenors of the Women's Rights Caucus. Through these spaces, the collective contributes to strengthening connections between young feminist organizing and wider feminist struggles for gender justice and human rights.

This work strengthens intergenerational movement-building while advancing governance practices grounded in participation, accountability, and power-sharing.

Engagement within Generation Equality, including as a Commitment Maker of the Feminist Movements and Leadership Action Coalition, as well as within Youth2030 and other multilateral processes, has contributed to feminist debates on accountability, resourcing, representation, and power within global governance institutions. These interventions have been particularly important at a time when feminist movements continue to raise concerns about the gap between institutional commitments to participation and the redistribution of resources, authority, and decision-making power.

Feminist Manch forms part of a broader generation of feminist organizing that has emerged in response to intersecting crises of democracy, inequality, militarization, and shrinking civic space. Such efforts strengthen movement infrastructure and build collective bargaining power, creating pathways through which structurally marginalized constituencies can shape political priorities on their own terms. Democratic governance requires the redistribution of power, resources, and decision-making authority. Feminist movement-building remains central to that struggle.

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Designed and illustrated by Maitree Muzumdar.



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THE POWER WE BUILT:

A conversation on

FIVE YEARS OF YOUNG FEMINIST LEADERSHIP & ORGANISING

INTRODUCTION

On July 1, 2026, the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) culmination event was convened in Nairobi by UN Women, the Government of Kenya, and other GEF stakeholders. This was a reflective moment on achievements, lessons learned, and the future of feminist multistakeholder action for gender equality for this concluding Generation Equality's initial five-year journey (2021–2026).

Young feminists have played critical roles in the last five years of the GEF, right from the moment of conceptualisation in 2019, influencing, youth organising and mainstreaming meaningful youth feminist leadership across this multistakeholder space, Action Coalitions, mid term point, youth led accountability and continue leading role in strategising for the next GEF journey.

Youth Coalition has been one of the vocal youth action coalition leaders and made significant contribution in the GEF process on youth engagement, accountability and youth organising, including a Young Feminist Unconference, a Youth Commitment Makers Town Hall, and the co-convening of the Midpoint Moment Youth Spotlight Session which created safe spaces for young people to shape GEF priorities, share progress and challenges in delivering commitments, and amplify youth leadership at the Generation Equality midpoint.

With that background, María León from Youth Coalition had a sit down interview with two vocal youth leaders Eunice Leyva Garcia and Xenia Kellner, who shaped young feminist engagement in the GEF process. Eunice Leyva Garcia is a former Executive Director of the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and youth leader of the GEF Action Coalition on SRHR & Bodily Autonomy. Xenia Kellner is a founder and former Executive Director of the Young Feminist Europe and youth leader of the GEF Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership.

In this episode, Eunice and Xenia walk us through the journey of youth organizing in the GEF, its impact on the process and lessons for current and future youth and young feminist movements.



YOUTH MOVEMENT BUILDING WITHIN THE GEF: WHERE IT ALL STARTED

María León: Could you quickly walk us through the journey of the youth constituency and movement within Generation Equality?

Xenia Kellner: I should start off because I was present during the inceptional phase. Eunice joined the space later. The whole GEF process started in mid or last quarter of 2019. The process began with the multi-stakeholder governance structure, and part of it was the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG). The Group had a 30% youth quota, to which Young Feminist Europe (my organisation) was seating. There was the Youth Task Force (YTF), which was set up by UN Women and was constituted by around 30 young people from diverse backgrounds. This was one of the interesting things about GEF's first governance structure because you could already see the impact of young feminist leadership on governance and power shifting.

So I realized at some point, the youth task force didn't sit in the multi-stakeholder governance structure, meaning they were not seated at the decision making table. The Youth Task Force always sat on the sidelines with the UN women and UN Youth Office. But the Youth Office did not really have decision making power. The Task Force was not set up by an independent civil society group, like the CSAG, which was selected by civil society. Rather, the Task Force had been set up by UN Women. So, I started connecting and engaging with the Youth Task Force more directly and saw what their vision for this process was.

This was the first powerful shift, which really took a lot of pushing and a lot of organizing behind the scenes to connect and create youth-led spaces. The Young Feminist Europe started to host more collaborative spaces with youth organizers together. Youth organising gave us collective power and took away our fear. I remember one of the first complicated things among the Youth Task Force members was a lot of fear to just work around UN women, or just be even in the youth space and because apparently if we did this, the UN system won't forget and we will be jeopardising our future engagements and careers.

María León: Anha! And what did you take of this?

Xenia Kellner: From my understanding, as a young person in such a space, you should use that youth power to create change beyond just you. This organizing around UN Women really had to happen because UN Women was blocking a lot of the collective action by the Youth Task Force. Many of the task force meetings seemed more like update meetings with UN Women only speaking.

María León: So are you saying it was a tokenistic space for the task force?

Xenia Kellner: There wasn't a clear collective vision for what actually the role of the task force was. They did not have a definition. They did not have answers to a lot of questions.

Like, what's my role? What should I do in space? Are we working collectively? What can we influence? What can we do? Do we have agenda setting powers?

When COVID hit, we already knew there would be an extension of the co-creation process of the space. So, the first big change and impact on the governance structure we had was that the Youth Task Force received an official seat at the core group joining Mexico, France, UN Women and CSAG, in all working groups and also became independent from UN Women. The Task Force also got an independent budget. Now the money thing caused some friction because UN Women and the Youth Office were not happy.

María León: Is that where the Young Feminist Manifesto came in?

Xenia Kenner: Not yet but at this point, there was a shift in youth engagement and the language for it. Differentiating youth-led organizations, youth-focused, youth-centered organizations, or youth programs and advisory groups of organizations. So, realizing the importance of youth-led organizations, in the conceptualization of the action coalitions, we managed to get two seats for each action coalition for youth-led organizations.

María León: And how was the reception among Youth Led Organizations?

Xenia Kellner: Initially, very few people and organizations understood the concept of Action Coalitions and few had applied to join. So we reopened the application for youth-led organizations and we received hundreds of applications from YLOs. The selection process was led by civil society and youth across the globe. Contention raised because the action coalitions had already started working on their blueprints because UN Women had wanted to launch them by February or March of 2021. And the youth leaders and commitment makers who were selected came in so late and they had not shaped the blueprints. Youth Coalition was the only youth led organization that was already onboard because it had applied in the first round. So we pushed for the process to be reopened because we needed more YLOs. UN Women really pushed back against this flexibility. And that's when the Young Feminist Manifesto came into play. We needed to challenge this power dynamic and so we mobilized a lot of other stakeholders to support us. The blue prints process was reopened and that was the first impact of the manifesto. And that was when the youth leaders came in.

Eunice Garcia: I also joined late. No, we were notified almost right after I started my role at the Youth Coalition. I started representing the Youth Coalition in the meetings for the Action Coalition. I came on board, and one of the things that I noticed right away was that UN Women had a very predetermined idea of what the participation of youth-led organizations in this space would look like. I didn't even know that there were other constituencies of youth in this process. I only thought that it was only the youth leaders in the action coalitions. We didn't know anything about the Youth Task Force. We were not connecting with it. There was no effort to link the youth groups to work together.

Xenia Kellner: They were even trying to prevent the youth connection because we had requested to get connected with the Action Coalition youth leaders quite often. And they just didn't share the contacts. It was so difficult to connect as young people within the process.

Eunice Garcia: I really think that there has to be a space for young people to come together and to understand who is in the space. And who is doing what, and what is our collective vision? Because that is part of convening power to design a common vision. This is part of the infrastructure that is missing in the ecosystem. Like, there is not a lot. One of the things that I requested from UN Women was to allow the Youth Coalition to host a youth space. So, the first thing that we did in January 2021 was to host a space only for young people, where we invited all the Action Coalition leaders and all the Youth Task Force members. We needed collective discussions on how to hold UN women and other partners accountable in terms of youth engagement. And that's how we came up with the idea of the Young Feminist Manifesto, a document we needed to align our positionality.

The whole process of the blueprints is another parenthesis. The blue prints were just a mere policy paper. So, we came up with the Young Feminist Manifesto to demand for youth engagement in the design of the process. The process was badly designed. For example, the times where they wanted to do things didn't match the previous work and specific moments such as the Paris Forum and then the Mexico City Forum.

Xenia Kellner: I think that there had been some collective organizing happening before but I felt like I carried so much of it, and a lot of people didn't understand this collective organising that includes challenging power. When Eunice came in, she understood the vision and it was easy to bond with her.

Eunice Garcia: And that is the absolute importance of investing in good leadership. Xenia and I had conversations about how do we actually move this forward? What type of infrastructure do we need? What type of processes do we need? What type of design do we need? And that was the beginning of our beautiful friendship.

Xenia Kellner: Exactly. I know it took a while.

Eunice Garcia: I didn't trust her at first but I later realised we have similar thoughts and we became friends. And friendship is so political. We held each other's positionality. For example Xen, as a white feminist from the Global North, her role was specific in the youth movement of the GEF. Her position was something, and then on my side, I understood the power I held as the Executive Director of one of the big youth-led organizations in the ecosystem.

Xenia Kellner: Yeah, thank you.

Eunice Garcia: We also had internal reflections on our own roles and power, and worked to ensure that it's not only us but all young people. For instance during the midterm point, UN Women had only invited four young people. But we protested, came together and we decided that it's either all of us or none of us.

Xenia Kellner: One another important shift about the Young Feminist Manifesto is that it made us realise that having a seat at the table was not enough. We needed agenda-setting and convening powers. The first step was organizing a whole day workshop on power and power analysis. And then, going from theory to practice, analyzing the process, all of these things happened. Where are the power imbalances that we are experiencing? So we made power invisible, and we wrote it down. We designed how the process would look like. We defined our vision and an agenda for change. Finally, we were exercising power. And then the unconference followed. The idea of the Young Feminist unconference was to create a space where we don't just talk about transformation, but where transformation can take place.

Eunice Garcia: We had a lot of young people from around the world attend the unconference virtually because it was also during COVID. So it was also very challenging to have an online space that was inclusive. The space was penetrated by anti-rights groups. We just did not have to fill a quota like what the action coalition thematic leaders at that time were doing, at least in our action coalition. It was very unclear how decision-making was being made, and they restricted youth input to the blueprints. For instance, much of our Youth Coalition's input to the SRHR & Bodily Autonomy blueprint was omitted. Input on CSE, sex workers, and queer rights were not reflected. Even recommendations we provided in meetings were rejected. So, it was a huge fight because they wanted to launch the blueprint by February 2021, and we said no.



GEF IMPACT ON YOUTH LEADERSHIP

María León: What lasting changes do you see in youth leadership and youth participation and the youth movement as a result of the GEF?

Eunice Garcia: Well, as the Youth Coalition, we had started testing a new vision of youth leadership and organizing. For example the principles of the Young Feminist Manifesto informed our engagements in multilateral spaces and we had a lot of political support. We always referenced it during meetings with Canada.

Overall, the manifesto challenged the individual models of youth championship that a lot of global organizations still have, especially those inherited from the Global North. I think that was one of the most lasting principle on co-creation and co-design. Though I have to make the annotation that the ecosystem is still not ready to implement those principles. We have a lot of people in the ecosystem who are extremely bright in terms of policies and human rights but do not know how to design processes. The GEF was the first multi-stakeholder space we piloted that approach and of course it was going to have a lot of mistakes. And in the Young Feminist Manifesto, we were actually using strategic narrative language, like, moving away from using youth participation to youth engagement.

Xenia Kellner: No, not moving away entirely but just to highlight that those are different models.

Eunice Garcia: But youth participation is a rights-based language. Like, it has to do with political participation. Like, the right to political participation.

Xenia Kellner: Okay, with participation in general, but then let's say the engagement and leadership just having language that all of these are different things which have to do with different power you're giving someone in a process or in a role.

Eunice Garcia: Exactly.

Xenia Kellner: And I do think that was a strategic shift also for people to start thinking about that. And I do fully agree with the co-design. I think it has been a big source of frustration sometimes, but also, of course, that's the learning process, because I absolutely agree, there is a lot of people working with transformative designing and curating different spaces, that's not necessarily the expertise you would find in a global space. But I feel like that's something we brought, where it was very process-oriented.

Eunice Garcia: And I don't think that the ecosystem has fully understood why we worked like that. To us, the process is as important as the result, even more important. Because in the process is where you actually build the methodology to include people and to make these spaces accessible to everyone. Power lies in the connections that you can make.

For example there is a difference between having funding and having access to the funding. You have to build relationships and that is exactly how we made it possible to fund the Young Feminists. That is the power of the GEF and this new vision of leadership that we had was also something that we wanted to replicate for the Young Feminist Caucus with lessons drawn.

Xenia Kellner: I think that was how we built sustainable infrastructure and I think throughout the GEF process, we mobilized and politicized a lot of. So the Young Feminist Caucus and the impact on other stakeholders and how they think about youth has changed and will change, I think, also in funder spaces, hopefully.

María León: I can really see the links between those first moments of field organizing, power analysis and connection building and how it translated into what the Young Feminist Caucus is now. And how we're trying to sustain the structure for the youth movement to be able to run on its own. Building a sustainable young feminist infrastructure for youth organizing outside of institutions that future generations use to engage.

As this phase of the GEF closes, what work do you think remains unfinished especially for the young feminist movement?

Xenia Kellner: Creating that methodology and process at the beginning gave us the opportunity for collective envisioning for different futures. And now we've lost a lot of that. We already experienced pushback, in the multilateral system and so we need space to create progressive, bold agendas. I think the work on multi-stakeholder governance is quite interesting. I hope that more of the methodology will be harvested. The learnings from GEF governance processes would be an interesting replica of it on a regional or even national level. I think that the biggest contribution of the GEF is the model, the methodology and the design. And young people can play a leadership role. If we talk about building feminist infrastructure, I definitely think that the GEF process has contributed to that. There are a lot of new coalitions. I think there was a lot of learning across multi-stakeholder spaces.

María León: Thank you, Xenia, and I completely agree with you on building bold agendas is super important, and that it's hard. I feel like it's a little bit harder to do it now.

Xenia Kellner: No, but not to get me wrong, I think it's difficult to continue creating visions and different realities if you know this will not be implemented due to lack of funding. Of course, building dreaming spaces. I think it's important to keep hoping to imagine something different, but also at some point you need to put something into practice as well. I hope that some of the young people who have been in the space and have been supported, will pass it on. Are there new people stepping in who fill the shoes? A strategic space is shrinking back to some of the old structures. What role can youth play a role in challenging exactly that?

María León: Exactly! The Young Feminist Caucus recognizes the need to expand our constituency and create a more inclusive space. While we have established our role within groups like the Birdsong Collective and Women's Rights Caucus, our next goal is to open this space for sharing power and knowledge, ensuring it remains dynamic and collaborative as part of our governance process.

Eunice Garcia: Oh yeah, one thing the GEF did was have a long-lasting contribution on how the ecosystem works in support of supporting young youth leadership.

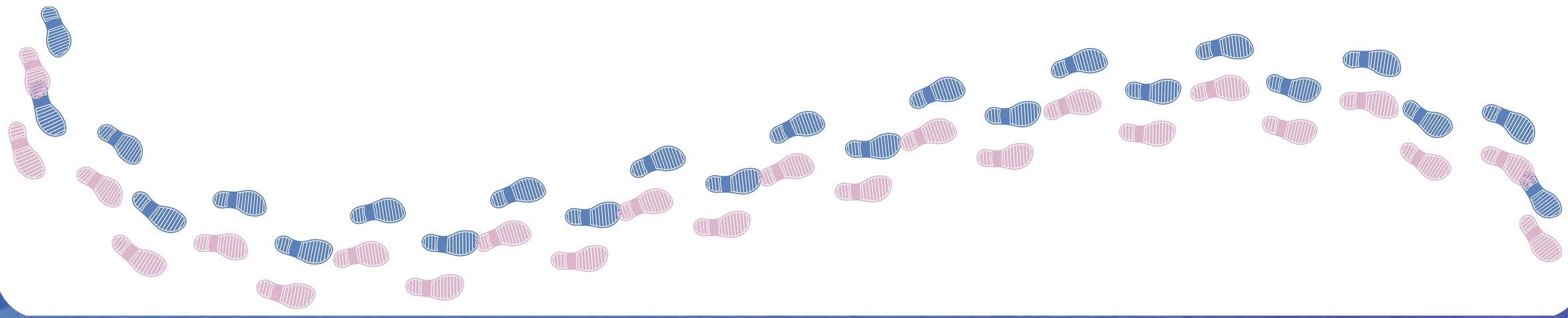
And I think that that's something that the Birdsong Collective did particularly well, and I thank the UN Foundation, because they gave the YFC space to co-create and co-could lead better processes with other coalitions that are way better established.

Xenia Kellner: It started with the bridge builders. So the UN Foundation was asking what would be helpful for youth and the first thing we did was to set up these bridge builders between youth and then other stakeholders. And then from there, I think also this thing coalition building needs funding because it's an additional work to our profile. If you do advocacy work in a feminist way, you don't just do it for your organization. You're also now collectively organizing with others, reflecting your power, sharing, seeing where you bring others and you're also the changemaker within your organization, and to transform your organization, because you then need to bring back these reflections on power and the positionality of the organization. So then there needs for more funding for coalition building and collective feminist work.

Eunice Garcia: How do you think that you can use your power in a better way, like, in service of the group, in service of the movement? And I think that is some finished work, also, sorry, sorry, is to have more spaces for political clarity and political coherence.

Xenia Kellner: Oh my god, María, I would love to talk about this with you. When we have more time. Because I do come from a long line of communist movement activists. So it's quite interesting to also see how the communist movement and this collective envisioning and hope was also repressed. So it was also with defunding. What is happening now has been happening before. And so I would love to also pick your brain about what I'm looking for.

María León: For example, with the funding that we got for the Young Feminist Caucus, we have managed to start building a governance structure, and that's also what UNF said to us, right? Like, this grant is made so that you can, like, establish yourselves. And then kind of start pooling funding from other places like a learning process with the other coalitions.



CONTINUITY: LESSONS TO NEXT GENERATION OF YOUNG FEMINIST ORGANISING

María León: So what advice would you give to the next generation of young feminist leaders and organizers?

Eunice Garcia: It's about your struggles, it's not just about mindlessly repeating the same process we've been doing. It's not just a matter of comparing one vision against another. People need to be deeply reflective about their leadership.

Xenia Kellner: Maybe understanding power as something neutral in the first place where you challenge power But sometimes that's where we get stuck. And that also happened honestly in the youth space during the GEF. I think it is just natural that we can fight, challenge ourselves and hold each other accountable in our movement, so it's fine. I feel like there needs to be some tolerance and space to learn from each other.

Eunice Garcia: Xenia and I learned more from each other in moments where we were in disagreement. But also make sure that you trust the person that you are disagreeing with. Make sure that you are able to build trust. But obviously we have never disagreed on the most basic things that are our principles and our values.

Xenia Kellner: And I think it's important to have this trust that If there's something that maybe you're not doing right, which is fine, like that happens all the time, especially learning in a leadership role, right? So having, trusting that. People would come to you instead of maybe just disengaging or talking behind their back.

Eunice Garcia: It is so important to have someone to challenge you and question you.

Xenia Kellner: Right.

María León: Yeah, I love that closing lesson and advice on unfinished work for the youth movement and to build spaces where we can hold conflict and disagree and kind of use that as a way of establishing a political horizon together.

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Designed and illustrated by Maitree Muzumdar.

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the yp foundation
feminist · intersectional · rights-based

POST-2026 VISION *towards*

YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS & LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

The Generation Equality Forum (GEF), conceptualized on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and officially launched in 2021 across Mexico City and Paris, represents one of the most ambitious multilateral architectures ever established to accelerate global gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Driven by an unprecedented intergenerational and multi-stakeholder governance model, the GEF mobilized an initial $40 billion in financial pledges, which has subsequently expanded to $50.3 billion as documented in the 2024 and 2026 reporting cycles. At the core of this global ecosystem is the Feminist Movements and Leadership Action Coalition (FML AC), a thematic pillar specifically tasked with uplifting feminist movements, protecting shrinking civic spaces, and advancing the substantive representation and decision-making power of women, girls, trans, intersex, and non-binary people across all sectors of society.

As the 2026 GEF milestone rapidly approaches, civil society organizations, accountability watchdogs, and strategic policy analysts must rigorously evaluate the initiative's empirical impact on feminist movements. The macroeconomic aggregates suggest a historic mobilization of capital and political will; however, a critical interrogation of the accountability data reveals profound structural disparities in resource distribution, pervasive bureaucratic barriers to grassroots participation, and a highly fragmented resourcing ecosystem that often reflects legacy administrative and funding models that hamper equitable distribution to frontline movements.In particular, youth-led and adolescent-girl-led organizations—despite universally serving as the primary drivers of frontline movement-building and crisis response—continue to face a severe funding gap estimated between $577 million and $652 million. This deficit highlights a critical disconnect between the rhetoric of multilateral commitments and the material realities experienced by grassroots activists.

Furthermore, the global context in which these movements operate has deteriorated significantly since the 2021 launch. The world is navigating intersecting polycrises, marked by escalating armed conflicts, climate emergencies, and a highly organized, well-funded anti-rights and anti-gender backlash. According to the latest assessments, not a single Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 indicator has been fully met, and based on current trajectories, it will take an estimated 137 years to eradicate extreme poverty for women and girls. Global parity in school enrollment has been nominally reached, yet 119.3 million girls remain entirely deprived of formal education, and child marriage is declining at a pace so sluggish that it will not be eradicated before the year 2092. Against this backdrop, the demands of young feminists for co-ownership of decisions, sustainable and flexible resourcing, trauma-informed practice, and the institutionalization of care as political infrastructure represent not merely aspirational ideals, but essential governance principles required to salvage the 2030 Agenda.



The Feminist Movements and Leadership Action Coalition has fundamentally attempted to redefine global paradigms for gender equality advocacy by actively shifting the focal point from traditional, siloed, and top-down bilateral programming toward sustained, intersectional movement-building. The coalition's guiding vision mandates that by 2026, feminist activists, women human rights defenders, and their organizations must be fully resourced, politically supported, and structurally integrated into decision-making architectures at all levels. The impact of the GEF process on feminist movements can be observed across three primary dimensions: the facilitation of collective policy advocacy, the mobilization of multi-stakeholder solidarity in times of crisis, and the gradual institutionalization of core feminist principles within traditionally rigid bureaucratic spaces.

To objectively assess the impact of GEF on feminist movements, accountability mechanisms must rigorously scrutinize the financial architecture supporting these commitments. The 2026 Financial Commitments Analysis Report provides a highly granular view of the $50.3 billion pledged towards GEF. While this aggregate figure represents a historic achievement in mobilizing resources for gender equality, the disbursement methodologies and recipient profiles reveal a deeply fragmented resourcing ecosystem.

AGGREGATE PLEDGES & DISBURSEMENTS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUP

The financial landscape of the Generation Equality Forum is overwhelmingly dominated by state and private sector actors, while civil society and youth-led organizations control only a minute fraction of the total capital. The structural inequities are evident in the distribution of pledged, secured, and spent funds across different constituencies.

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	TOTAL PLEDGED	TOTAL SECURED	TOTAL SPENT	PRIMARY FINANCIAL MECHANISM
Governments	$22.2 Billion	$13.2 Billion	$9.1 Billion	Domestic public budgets, legislative appropriations
Private Sector	$12.4 Billion	$11.3 Billion	$10.3 Billion	Internal supply chains, equity investments
Multilaterals	$11.7 Billion	$13.2 Billion	$548 Million	Project-specific grants, multi-donor pooled funds
Philanthropy	$3.5 Billion	$2.6 Billion	$1.8 Billion	Flexible grants, endowment drawdowns
Civil Society	$403 Million	$135 Million	$97 Million	In-kind contributions, external grants
Youth-Led Organizations	$7.5 Million	N/A	$100,000	Volunteer mobilization, micro-grants

**Refers to actual disbursements reaching implementing partners.*

ANALYZING THE STRUCTURAL INEQUITIES IN THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE

The data indicates that 78 percent of secured government funding ($10.4 billion) flows entirely through domestic public budget allocations. While this demonstrates commendable institutional ownership and political will to embed gender equality into national systems, it concurrently means that the vast majority of government pledges are locked within national boundaries. These funds rarely reach transnational feminist movements, global advocacy networks, or grassroots organizations operating in the Global South under restrictive regimes. Furthermore, government spending is highly uneven across regions; North America accounts for the majority of funds disbursed, while only 15 percent of the $9.7 billion pledged to all other regions has been spent, risking the widening of regional gaps.

Private sector financing is similarly characterized by severe concentration.

A staggering 99 percent of the $12.4 billion pledged by the private sector originates from just two entities: Procter & Gamble ($10 billion focused on gender-responsive corporate spending across its supply chain) and Amartha ($2.3 billion for women-led micro-enterprises in Indonesia). While these initiatives generate substantial economic impact, the lack of broad-based private sector participation in funding feminist civil society is glaring. Only $200,000 in private sector funding was reported as directly pledged to youth- or adolescent-led organizations.

For civil society, the funding landscape is actively shrinking. CSO pledges fell from $475 million in 2023 to $403 million in 2024, with nearly half of the resources originating from just two organizations (the Equality Fund and EngenderHealth). This contraction threatens the diversity of the civil society ecosystem, limits the ability of grassroots women's rights organizations to sustain long-term work, and weakens local ownership of gender equality initiatives.

THE DECISION-MAKING POWER FINANCIAL GAP

The disparity in funding is most acutely observed in initiatives dedicated to expanding full and equal decision-making power. Under the FML commitments focused on leadership, civic space, and participation, severe financial gaps persist between what has been pledged and what has actually reached implementing partners.

STAKEHOLDER	PLEDGED FOR DECISION-MAKING	SPENT / IMPLEMENTED	FINANCIAL GAP
Governments	$5.7 Billion	$2.8 Billion	$2.9 Billion
Multilaterals	$525.5 Million	$53.5 Million	$472 Million
Civil Society	$351.2 Million	$136.5 Million	$214.7 Million
Philanthropy	$605 Million	$857,600	$604.1 Million

The disbursement gap in leadership funding highlights the need to align institutional risk frameworks with flexible, trust-based funding models that support grassroots leadership.



PREREQUISITES FOR MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: TANGIBLE NEEDS

For youth-led and adolescent-led organizations to transition from peripheral participants to meaningful co-architects of processes like the Generation Equality Forum, the multilateral ecosystem must address specific tangible deficits.

FLEXIBLE, CORE, AND MULTI-YEAR RESOURCING

The most urgent tangible need for youth-led organizations is immediate access to direct, flexible, and predictable financing. Despite driving high-impact results, youth- and adolescent-led organizations mobilized only $7.48 million in pledges, while reporting a staggering funding gap of $577 million to $652 million required to fulfill their own Generation Equality commitments.

Current funding architectures prioritize restrictive, project-specific grants that demand burdensome administrative reporting. Bureaucratic hurdles are consistently cited as the number one barrier to disbursement across all stakeholder groups. For youth collectives, navigating labyrinthine United Nations or governmental reporting portals constitutes massive, uncompensated labor. To engage meaningfully, youth-led organizations require unrestricted core funding that allows them to pay staff, rent safe physical spaces, maintain digital security infrastructure, and respond agilely to emerging crises without requiring prior donor authorization for every budget reallocation.

ACCESSIBLE MULTILATERAL PLATFORMS AND VISA JUSTICE

The physical and digital infrastructure of multilateralism often operates as a mechanism of exclusion. Tangible engagement requires the dismantling of logistical and geographic barriers. This includes providing fully funded travel, accommodations, and per diems for young feminists from the Global South to attend global convenings, ensuring they are not excluded by the prohibitive costs of international participation. Furthermore, "visa justice" must be prioritized. Multilateral hosts and United Nations agencies must actively facilitate immigration processes, ensuring that grassroots activists are not routinely denied entry to decision-making tables due to discriminatory border regimes and passport inequalities.

LANGUAGE JUSTICE AND TRANSLATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Multilingual organizing is a deliberate political act. According to the FML AC foundational principles, Language Justice recognizes that linguistic diversity is absolutely fundamental to achieving meaningful participation and power-sharing.

When forums default to English or dominant colonial languages, they systematically marginalize grassroots activists, particularly Indigenous youth and rural organizers. Tangible engagement requires robust, continuous translation and interpretation infrastructure, treating language accessibility as a core tool for inclusive feminist democracy rather than an expensive technical afterthought.

DATA SOVEREIGNTY AND SKILLS CAPACITY BUILDING

Youth-led organizations require tangible support to build their internal capacities regarding data sovereignty and monitoring frameworks. The burden of generating evidence to satisfy donor requirements often distracts from frontline activism. Meaningful engagement requires the simplification of reporting standards and the adoption of movement-defined accountability metrics that capture qualitative relational work, rather than forcing grassroots collectives to conform to rigid, donor-centric quantitative indicators. Providing technical assistance in a non-extractive manner allows youth organizations to retain ownership of their data and utilize it for their own strategic advocacy.

PREREQUISITES FOR MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: INTANGIBLE NEEDS

Beyond financial capital and logistical resources, the intangible prerequisites for youth engagement dictate whether a multilateral process is genuinely transformative or dangerously extractive. Governance models, emotional labor, and power dynamics must be actively interrogated.

DECOLONIALITY AND THE RECOGNITION OF POLITICAL AGENCY

The foundational principle of Decoloniality draws direct attention to the historical extraction of knowledge, legitimacy, and resources from the Global South. For young feminists, engaging in GEF requires multilateral institutions to shift from traditional beneficiary-focused models toward frameworks that recognize young feminists as equal strategic partners and political actors. Youth must be recognized not merely as "voices of the future" or vulnerable beneficiaries requiring salvation, but as present-day political actors & leaders with immediate agency. Meaningful engagement necessitates redistributive approaches that actively restore ownership and agenda-setting power to young feminists, allowing them to define the parameters of the debate rather than responding to predetermined institutional agendas.

CARE AS GOVERNANCE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

Young feminists organize in the context of multiple, intersecting crises—including climate emergencies, armed conflict, and a vicious anti-gender & SRHR backlash that routinely subjects them to surveillance, criminalization, and digital violence. Consequently, the emotional and psychological toll of activism is immense. The FML AC principle of Care as Governance dictates that all decision-making and accountability processes must be fundamentally grounded in empathy and trauma-informed practice.

Care cannot be relegated to a peripheral wellness concern or an individualized responsibility; it must be institutionalized as a core governance principle. This means designing multilateral processes that respect capacity limits, reject the normalization of unpaid and exhausted activist labor, and actively fund rest, psychosocial support, and collective healing as legitimate, necessary programmatic expenditures.

INTERGENERATIONAL POWER-SHARING AND CO-LEADERSHIP

The FML Action Coalition recognizes that feminist movements thrive on equitable, intergenerational power-sharing. Too often, however, these spaces prioritize institutional tenure over lived experience. Meaningful youth engagement requires dismantling these hierarchies to finally transition from token consultation to genuine structural co-ownership.

Youth must be integrated through authentic co-leadership mechanisms, where they hold veto power, agenda-setting capabilities, and equal voting rights on steering committees and core groups. It requires older feminists and institutional allies to move beyond "tick-box" intersectionality and practice mutual mentorship—recognizing that young feminists possess distinct, lived-experience-based expertise that is equally valid to decades of institutional tenure. As demanded by the Young Feminist Manifesto, institutions must pivot from top-down consultative models to architectures of true co-ownership.

NAVIGATING LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS AS EMOTIONAL AND POLITICAL PROCESSES

A critical, yet historically under-theorized, intangible need involves the navigation of leadership transitions within feminist movements. Intergenerational transitions are deeply emotional, political, and relational processes. As young feminists "age out" of youth-specific funding categories or identity brackets (e.g., crossing the age of 30 or 35), they often face an "age cliff" that triggers feelings of instability, loss of political identity, and systemic displacement.

Supporting youth-led organizations means creating graceful, financially supported pathways for leadership transitions. This requires movements and donors to facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfer, provide emotional and financial support for exiting leaders, and ensure that institutional memory is preserved. A failure to resource and emotionally support these transitions frequently leads to organizational collapse and severe burnout among departing youth leaders, weakening the broader feminist ecosystem.

ARCHITECTING THE POST-2026 VISION AND STRATEGY

As the Generation Equality initiative maps its strategic trajectory beyond the initial 2026 milestone, an overwhelming 94 percent of Commitment Makers recommend scaling the initiative as a permanent accelerator for the 2030 Agenda. For civil society, youth leaders, and feminist movement architects, the post-2026 strategy must pivot decisively from the mere aggregation of financial pledges toward the enforcement of structural accountability, ecosystem resilience, and the radical redistribution of power. The strategic roadmap for the post-2026 era must integrate the following core imperatives.

BUILDING RESILIENCE AGAINST THE ANTI-RIGHTS BACKLASH

The post-2026 strategy must proactively counter the highly organized and well-funded anti-rights and anti-gender backlash. Multilateral frameworks must establish rapid-response, flexible funding mechanisms to protect feminist organizers facing criminalization, surveillance, and digital violence. Accountability structures must actively monitor and challenge both state and non-state actors attempting to dismantle progress on the 2030 Agenda and SDG 5 indicators.

SHIFTING POWER AND MANDATING DIRECT LOCAL FUNDING

The glaring disparity between the $50.3 billion pledged globally and the chronic underfunding of grassroots feminist and youth-led groups must be rectified. The post-2026 framework must institute mandatory, trackable funding targets, stipulating that a specific, significant percentage of all multilateral and philanthropic GEF pledges be channeled directly to local, youth-led, and Global South feminist organizations, deliberately bypassing Northern intermediary NGOs that often absorb substantial overhead costs. The strategy must incentivize trust-based philanthropy, unrestricted core funding, and multi-year grants as the primary instruments of feminist financing, moving away from restrictive, short-term projectization.



INSTITUTIONALIZING INTERGENERATIONAL CO-GOVERNANCE AND ALIGNMENT WITH GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS

The ad-hoc inclusion of youth that characterized early multilateral processes must be permanently retired. The post-2026 vision must formally institutionalize intergenerational co-governance within all United Nations and GEF structures. This includes mandating youth representation on all funding allocation boards, policy drafting committees, and accountability tribunals.

Furthermore, the post-2026 strategy must tightly align with the outcomes of the Pact for the Future, the Financing for Development (FfD4) agenda, and the Beijing+30 review. This includes utilizing SDG Indicator 5.c.1 (the tracking and publishing of public allocations for gender equality) as a central benchmark to hold governments accountable for translating high-level political commitments into transparent budgetary action.

GEF must adopt the FML principles of Language Justice and Care as Governance across all its operations to ensure that participation remains deeply equitable, sustainable, and aligned with the normative frameworks of the Beijing Platform for Action.

CONCLUSION

The Generation Equality Forum has undeniably catalyzed a historic mobilization of capital and political will, establishing a new multilateral paradigm for gender equality. Through the Feminist Movements and Leadership Action Coalition, the initiative has successfully elevated the critical importance of resourcing movements, defending civic space, and advancing feminist co-leadership on the global stage.

The true legacy of the Generation Equality Forum will be determined by its capacity to adapt. By dismantling logistical barriers, prioritizing core funding for grassroots networks, and operationalizing Care as Governance, the multilateral system can successfully equip young feminist movements to secure the 2030 Agenda.

For youth-led, girl-led, and movement-led organizations to engage meaningfully in the post-2026 GEF landscape, they require far more than an invitation to a consultative panel. Tangibly, they require the provision of unrestricted, multi-year core funding; the dismantling of linguistic and logistical barriers through language and visa justice; and the operationalization of data sovereignty. Intangibly, they demand the institutionalization of decoloniality, trauma-informed care as a governance principle, and the emotional and political support necessary to navigate the complex realities of intergenerational power-sharing and leadership transitions.

As the 2030 deadline approaches, the ultimate success of the Generation Equality initiative will not be measured by the aggregate billions pledged, but by its capacity to radically redistribute power, reshape multilateral governance, and place resources directly into the hands of the young feminist movements that are architecting the future of global justice.

young feminist caucus

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Designed and illustrated by Maitree Muzumdar.

young feminist caucus

FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE MAPA

Wild Heart KENYA

SPRING OF THE ARID & SEMI ARID LANDS
– Towards Thriving Pastoral Communities –

NAVIGATING UNSPOKEN HIERARCHIES: *the* YOUNG FEMINIST CLIMATE LEADERSHIP MANIFESTO

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PURPOSE STATEMENT AND LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

In a world grappling with intersecting crises of climate collapse, democratic backsliding, crackdowns on dissent, shrinking civic space, and a financial system that continues to deprioritize human rights, gender equality and justice, it is common to feel as though our efforts are never enough. It's natural to feel that the problems are so immense, systems are so fragile, and that solutions we build are so small against the scale of planetary and humanitarian challenges.

As young feminists engaging within UN systems at the intersections of gender, climate and environmental justice, we found ourselves carrying this question with urgency: what have we achieved? What transformations have we helped shape? What barriers have we dismantled? And what still lies ahead?

It became clear to us that if we did not document these moments ourselves, they would be lost, flattened or even rewritten by others.

Since Beijing +25 and the launch of the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), young feminists have played a crucial role in advancing feminist climate justice. Through the Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice, youth-led organizations as leaders and commitment makers have shaped commitments, influenced multilateral negotiations, mobilized communities, and built new methodologies for collective leadership. As GEF approaches the end of its five year initial phase, it is both urgent and necessary to capture the legacy, achievements, and struggles that have defined this chapter of young feminist climate justice organizing, movement building and leadership. Young feminists did not only participate in Generation Equality and FACJ; they expanded access, built feminist methodologies, networks, movements, language, formal collaborations with member states, and created accountability practices that institutions should now learn from and resource.

Data tell a powerful story. The 2024 GEF Accountability Report revealed that youth-led organizations account for 83% of programmatic commitments (27 PG GEF), yet only 27% of those involving youth organizations are backed by financial resources, leaving a $652 million funding gap (PG 9). These numbers expose both the scale of youth leadership and the structural inequalities that constrain it.

However, numbers alone cannot capture the full story. This Manifesto exists because we believe in youth-led autonomous documentation. It is especially important because youth and young feminist leadership within Generation Equality and its multistakeholder partnerships model has often produced outcomes that are not fully captured by institutional reporting.

These include trust-building, cross-movement solidarity, intergenerational learning, informal negotiation, collective care, and the political education required to move from participation to influence. It exists because impact must not solely be measured by institutional frameworks, but by lived realities, community building, political courage, and the methodologies we have built to survive and reshape multilateral systems.

It is time for us to write our own story; to measure our own impact, to document our solutions, to honestly and vulnerably name our challenges, and to leave behind a legacy that encourages future young feminists to step boldly into the intersections of gender and climate justice, including in international multilateral and multi-stakeholder settings.

This is why we embarked on a journey of autonomous data collection and reflection, documenting the community-rooted work of our sister organizations – Wild Heart Kenya (WHK) and Spring of the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (SASAL) – while also assessing the multilateral engagement of Fridays For Future Most Affected People and Areas (FFF MAPA) across intergovernmental spaces. This manifesto is not a celebration without critique, nor is it an annual report. It is a political archive, a toolkit, and a torch. It stands as proof that young feminists have not only participated in global climate governance and decision making, but that we have shaped it. In doing so, it invites the next generation of feminists to go further.

Lead Organizations: The work of this Manifesto has been led by three organizations: Fridays For Future MAPA, Wild Heart Kenya, and Spring of the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands.

FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE MAPA

Fridays For Future MAPA (Most Affected People and Areas) is a youth-led decentralized movement consisting of local, national, and regional organizations and activists from the Most Affected Areas by the climate crisis. The term MAPA: Most Affected People and Areas arises to make the communities that suffer the most from the effects of Climate Change and environmental degradation more visible. MAPA includes all territories in the Global South (Asia, Africa, Latin America, Pacific Islands, etc.) as well as marginalized communities (BIPOC[1], women, LGBTQIA+ people, etc.) that might live anywhere in the world. FFF MAPA's work is rooted in the very principle of intersectionality.

Cultural, political, and social identities (gender, race, caste, disability, and others) do not operate in isolation; they overlap to produce distinct systems of privilege and disadvantage. Those overlaps determine both who absorbs the worst of climate shocks and who has the resources and standing to survive them. FFF MAPA's work on the UN Women convened Generation Equality Forum (GEF) and with its diverse stakeholders in a partnership model was an extension to address the very critical nexus of climate and gender.

FFF MAPA made six programmatic commitments under GEF focused on creating communication channels to amplify the voices of frontline activists, creating capacity-building spaces, fostering collaborations, empowering women at different levels, and taking transformational action on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and climate change, especially supporting Indigenous women and girls.

WILD HEART KENYA

Wild Heart Kenya is a women-led grassroots organization working with communities, especially women and girls affected by climate change. Their work examines the intersection of how communities in rural Kenya are affected by wildlife conflicts, particularly women and girls.

WHK's collective engagement has seen over 150 community members benefit from the mangrove restoration programs and more than 30,000+ mangroves planted. In addition, they use their grassroots experience to contribute as a commitment maker to the Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice under the Generation Equality Forum, convened by UN Women.

SPRING OF THE ARID AND SEMI-ARID LANDS (SASAL)

SASAL is an indigenous youth-led non-governmental organization working with indigenous pastoralist communities in the arid and semi-arid lands of Kenya to improve their climate resilience. They achieve this through various projects aimed at building gender-equal and climate-resilient communities. SASAL has made a great impact and touched many lives through their land restoration, health clinic, climate storytelling, advocacy, and gender-equal, climate-resilient model projects. SASAL engages with the FACJ-AC as a programmatic commitment maker. Their commitment to implementing the "Enkang model for gender equality and climate resilience" is a traditional village model that promotes sustainable livelihood activities to build climate resilience and advance gender equality practices. The model, which uses observational learning as a technique for changing deeply rooted mindsets and perceptions of extremely patriarchal communities (pastoralists), is a ground-breaking, innovative way to promote gender equality in communities where it seems impossible and where the rights of women and girls have always been compromised.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY: BUILDING YOUNG FEMINIST POWER WITHIN THE GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM

The Generation Equality Forum (GEF)[2], convened by UN Women in 2021 as a five-year project, marked a historic moment of global mobilization to advance gender equality through a bold multi-stakeholder partnership and commitments. In response to the slow pace of progress since the Beijing Platform for Action[3], the GEF launched six Action Coalitions[4] and the Compact[5] designed to catalyze urgent action across critical thematic areas. Among these, the Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice (FACJ)[6] emerged as a global platform to formally recognize feminist climate leadership across sectors and resource gender-just solutions to the climate crisis.

FACJ brought together governments, UN agencies, civil society, youth, Indigenous communities, feminist movements, philanthropies, and the private sector under a shared mandate: to ensure that climate and environmental action is feminist, intersectional, and centered on those most impacted yet least responsible for the crisis. It created space for innovative leadership and accountability, setting a new standard for what inclusive climate governance could look like. At the heart of this initiative were youth leaders as architects of a new feminist vision for climate justice. Young feminists across regions carried the significant share of commitments under the GEF, driving climate justice action in contexts shaped by conflict, colonial legacies, ecological destruction, and political instability. Despite limited resources and access to funding, youth-led organizations delivered on programmatic commitments, demonstrating that transformative climate action is already being built from the ground up.

The value of the Action Coalition model was that it made visible a wider ecosystem of actors and enabled young feminist, Indigenous, grassroots, and MAPA leaders to engage not only as beneficiaries or speakers, but as commitment-makers, advisors, experts, bridge-builders, and accountability actors. At the same time, one of its core limitations was that this expanded political space was not consistently matched by adequate, flexible, and accessible funding for those doing the majority of community-based delivery. This tension is central to the legacy of FACJ: it expanded the terms of participation, but also revealed the structural resourcing gaps that continue to shape young feminist and frontline climate justice leadership.

The process model demonstrates the power of a feminist and youth-led approach to movement building: when the political space is expanded instead of just shared, new leadership emerges, and the structure itself becomes more democratic, intersectional, and accountable to those most affected. Today, WHK, SASAL, and Engajamundo continue to advance their commitments with autonomy and political clarity.

Their contributions enrich FACJ's global work with grounded feminist climate strategies shaped by lived experiences, community, care, and movement wisdom.

FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE MOST AFFECTED PEOPLES AND AREAS (FFF MAPA) AS YOUTH LEADERS AND BRIDGE-BUILDERS

As Fridays For Future MAPA, we stepped into the GEF campaign as Youth Leaders of the FACJ Action Coalition, and later on, as members of the Multi-Stakeholder Leadership Group (MSLG)[7], the central advisory body guiding UN Women — GEF Coordination Hub's strategy, advocacy, and monitoring to work on multistakeholder partnerships through GEF. Our role was not only to represent youth but to embed MAPA's leadership, feminist climate justice principles, and grassroots realities into the fabric of global policy, which has historically excluded young feminists, especially from the Global South.

One of our core commitments[8] as Action Coalition youth leaders was to bridge-build between grassroots movements and global policy-making spaces. Ensuring that young feminist realities, methodologies, and expertise shaped multilateral processes rather than remaining tokenized or, worse, extracted. This bridging commitment responded directly to a long-standing gap inside global gender and climate justice governance – grassroots and feminist youth are often asked to "participate" but are rarely recognized as the producers of knowledge, solutions, and methodologies that the systems urgently need. We committed to shifting this dynamic by expanding the political space so others could lead.

This bridge-building role was especially important because meaningful youth engagement requires more than access to a seat at the table; it requires redistribution of information, resources, relationships, and decision-making power so that grassroots and frontline actors can participate on their own terms.

GROWING FEMINIST CLIMATE LEADERSHIP: FROM COMMITMENTS TO A NETWORK OF YOUNG FEMINIST LEADERS

Through our bridge-building work within FACJ, we supported the onboarding and leadership development of three frontline youth-led organizations, each rooted in feminist and community-based climate action:

1. Wild Heart Kenya (WHK)
2. Spring of the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (SASAL)
3. Engajamundo Youth Association

These organizations were among the earliest to articulate the importance of feminist climate and environment methodologies in their local contexts. However, they still faced structural barriers to entering global platforms.

Through sustained collaborations, mentorship, and resource-sharing, we accompanied their transition from community-focused leaders to formal FACJ commitment-makers and later to be recognized as Youth Leaders within the Action Coalition.

WHY THIS BACKGROUND MATTERS

The story of FACJ Youth Leaders, especially those from MAPA and grassroots feminist movements, has rarely been documented within the broader history of the Generation Equality Forum. Yet, their contributions are foundational to the transformation of FACJ into a truly feminist, youth-led, and justice-centered Action Coalition.

This Manifesto emerges from the need to document this legacy, to honor the leadership that continues to reshape global gender and climate governance from the inside, and to build an archive of feminist methodologies developed by young feminists from across the world.

By capturing this history, we aim to:

- Protect the political memory of young feminist climate justice movements and our leadership.
- Make visible the methodologies we built through practice.
- Hold institutions accountable for their commitments.
- Strengthen intergenerational and cross-movement learning.
- Guide future young feminist advocates entering global and other such spaces.

Thus, increasing our collective progress on addressing climate change and environmental degradation.



OUR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This Manifesto is guided by the theoretical framework that centers young feminists and climate justice activists as autonomous actors driving systemic change within multi-stakeholder and multilateral ecosystems. It draws on five interrelated pillars:

1. GENDER-RESPONSIVE, TRANSFORMATIVE AND INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

Recognizing that gender, age, and intersecting social identities shape access, power, resources and decision-making, this framework emphasizes inclusive and gender-responsive climate justice action. It highlights the critical role of youth-led initiatives in advancing gender equality and climate justice, ensuring all young women, girls and marginalized groups have a meaningful voice, leadership and decision making.

2. YOUTH AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT

Youth-led organizations have implemented an important share of commitments under the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), although they often face structural constraints, including limited access to financial resources. This framework positions youth as autonomous agents, capable of leading advocacy, impact measurement, and accountability initiatives, thereby strengthening youth-led climate action and transformative leadership.

3. SYSTEMS AND MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS AND THINKING

Young feminists operate within complex multilateral and multi-stakeholder ecosystems. Systems thinking provides a lens to understand the interconnected social, environmental, and political structures that influence youth-led action, ensuring that their efforts contribute to sustainable, scalable, and transformative outcomes to advance climate justice and gender equality.

4. DECOLONIAL AND KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE PERSPECTIVES

Prioritizing youth-led autonomous data collection and impact documentation challenges externally imposed evaluation approaches over valuing locally grounded knowledge. It ensures that the experiences, strategies, and achievements of young feminists and climate justice activists are recognized within global accountability mechanisms.

5. ECO-FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

Eco-feminist restoration movements such as the Chipko Movement[9] and the Green Belt Movement[10] have demonstrated the potential to advance justice by increasing women's involvement in environmental governance.

These campaigns have been based on community consultations and inclusion of local organizations. They are central in providing platforms for all women's voices to be heard. This is crucial where women have been locked out of formal systems of governance, **especially in contexts where women have been excluded from formal governance systems and from consultations on development decisions that directly affect their well-being and livelihoods.**

Initiatives grounded in recognition of justice tend to legitimize ecological knowledge, culture, and the lived experiences of women. It has been well established that indigenous and rural women have been central to knowledge of local ecologies. However, in the context of restoration, this knowledge has often been disregarded in favour of scientific models, often ignoring vital inputs that can lead to the success of projects. Women-led restoration challenges this structure by centring local knowledge in environmental action. Recognizing that women can be political agents who shape restoration efforts rather than being merely passive beneficiaries can lead to more nuanced and localised approaches.[11]

Together, these perspectives inform a framework for documenting achievements, challenges, and transformative impact, supporting credible youth-led measurement of progress, and reinforcing the role of young feminists in advancing inclusive gender-responsive climate action.



CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES: FIVE YEARS OF YOUNG FEMINIST CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

This section is not a celebration nor a report card. Over five years within the Generation Equality Forum and the Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice, we did transformative work. We also carried structural burdens that no amount of commitment or political will could fully address. Both realities belong in this archive. Documenting only the wins produces an incomplete picture for future young feminists. Documenting only the struggles erases the evidence that change is possible. What follows is an account of what we achieved and what we worked through, held together as feminist climate justice demands.

The challenges documented show what becomes visible when young feminists are no longer outside the room, but close enough to understand how power operates inside it. Entering these spaces allowed us to identify the structural conditions that shape participation: who is resourced, who is heard, who is expected to absorb unpaid labour, whose knowledge is translated into policy, and whose leadership is treated as temporary or symbolic. Naming these conditions is itself a political shift, because it moves the conversation from individual access to structural transformation. Moreover, **success and struggle are not separate stories. The same structures that made youth leadership visible also exposed young feminists to under-resourcing, tokenism, administrative burdens, and emotional labor. Holding both together is a feminist documentation practice.**

CHALLENGES

1. FUNDING GAPS AND EXTRACTIVE PARTICIPATION

The most persistent structural challenge across five years was the fundamental mismatch between the labor demanded of youth-led organizations and the resources made available to sustain it. **The 2024 Generation Equality Accountability Report**[12] shows that financial commitments across the GEF reached USD 50.3 billion, and yet civil society and youth-led organizations, which carry the majority of programmatic delivery, remain the most systematically under-resourced actors in the ecosystem. The **2023 Accountability Report**[13] found that civil society and youth-led organizations accounted for 65% of off-track commitments, not because of a failure of will or expertise, but because under-resourcing is structurally embedded in how the system relates to them.

For FFF MAPA, WHK, and SASAL, this was not an abstraction. It shaped every decision: which events we could attend, which coalitions we could sustain, which community consultations we could properly resource, and how long we could ask our teams to absorb costs (financial, logistical, and emotional) that the system refused to cover.

A study by the Youth Climate Justice Fund[14] found that between 2022 and 2024, only 0.96% of grants from major climate foundations supported youth-led climate initiatives. The UNDP report 'Gender and Climate Finance'[15] found that just 0.01% of global funding supports projects addressing both climate change and women's rights simultaneously. These figures reflect what we experienced directly: the most intersectional, most frontline work is precisely the work that the funding architecture is least designed to reach.

This dynamic created a particular form of extractive participation, in which institutions invited our expertise, featured our stories, counted our commitments in their reports, and celebrated our presence in their outcomes documentation, while the costs of showing up remained largely borne by us. FFF MAPA's formal commitment under FACJ as an Action Coalition leader is documented in FACJ's 61 Stories of Change[16], as is the work of WHK and SASAL, whose restoration and resilience work is recognized in that same publication. The funding gap, however, persists. Visibility without resourcing is not inclusion and participation without flexible, accessible, and sustained funding risks becoming extraction.

This is not only a financial problem. It is also a governance problem. When young feminist and frontline organizations are expected to deliver commitments without predictable support, they are effectively asked to subsidize global accountability frameworks through unpaid or underpaid labour. Future models of feminist climate governance must therefore treat resourcing, accessibility, care, interpretation, travel, safety, and core organizational support as conditions of meaningful participation, not as optional add-ons.

What this taught us: funding is not separate from feminist climate justice; it is one of the conditions that determines whether participation is meaningful, sustainable, and safe.

2. TOKENISM AND THE FLATTENING OF GLOBAL SOUTH IDENTITY

Within multilateral spaces, the Global South is routinely treated as a monolith, collapsing the extraordinary diversity of regions, languages, ecosystems, civil society movements, and political histories into a single placeholder for "affected communities **FACJ's 61 Stories of Change**[17] feature organizations from Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Trinidad and Tobago, and beyond, reflecting the actual geographic and political breadth of feminist climate leadership. In negotiation rooms and policy documents, however, this diversity is routinely compressed. Young African feminists are asked to speak on behalf of a continent of 54 countries. Indigenous pastoralist youth from Kenya's SASAL are grouped with coastal organizers, urban advocates, and forest defenders under a single "Global South voice". As youth leaders from the global south, we experienced this directly. The same expertise that made us valuable to institutions was the expertise most often asked to simplify itself, translate itself, or fit itself into frameworks designed elsewhere.

Tokenism also took subtler forms.

Youth were invited to speak on panels but excluded from drafting and co-design processes. We were cited as evidence of inclusion without being consulted on strategy, and the perspectives we contributed disappeared between document drafts. This Manifesto itself is a response to that pattern: a collective act of naming where the GEF fell short and proposing a concrete path toward co-leadership, co-creation, and co-ownership. It is not an act of opposition. It is an act of feminist accountability, demonstrating that naming a problem and offering a solution is itself a form of political leadership.

The lesson is clear: meaningful youth and MAPA engagement cannot be reduced to representation, visibility, or storytelling. It requires agenda-setting power, access to information in time to influence decisions, participation in drafting and strategy processes, and recognition of the diversity of expertise within and across youth movements. Without these shifts, inclusion becomes symbolic rather than transformative.

What this taught us: representation matters, but it is only the beginning. The deeper work is to protect the complexity, specificity, and political agency of the communities we come from.

3. INSTITUTIONAL GATEKEEPING AND ACCOUNTABILITY FAILURES

Multilateral systems were not designed for youth, nor feminists, nor frontline communities from the Global South. Entering them required learning an entirely new language, not just the technical language of climate negotiations and policy frameworks, but the informal language of institutional power: who holds the door, who sits at which table, and what it costs to challenge the architecture from within. Institutional borders were present at every level; In the early years of FACJ engagement, accessing the Multi-Stakeholder Leadership Group (the central advisory body guiding the GEF Coordination Hub), young feminist organizations from MAPA, regardless of the depth of their analysis or the scale of their community impact were required to navigate hierarchies that presupposed institutional backing, established organizational profiles, and proximity to the Global North funding ecosystem.

Accountability frameworks within the GEF, while representing an important step forward, reproduced some of these same tensions. The Accountability Framework, which FFF MAPA was deeply involved in shaping, institutionalized annual reporting by commitment makers and created new pathways for transparency. But the tool measured only what institutions know how to measure: financial pledges, policy outputs, and programme numbers and the stories, while written on us were still not enough and qualitative shifts could be centered more. It struggled to capture what young feminist movements know to be equally real: the informal knowledge brokering, the relationship-building across movements, the political courage required to challenge a document in a negotiation room, the community trust that takes years to earn and cannot be quantified.

Therefore, we brought a decolonial understanding of accountability, as outlined in the methodologies section, into these processes, insisting that accountability must recognize historical power imbalances, uneven access to resources, and the realities of organizations operating in crisis-affected, under-resourced contexts. That argument was heard but was not always acted upon.

This exposed a deeper challenge: accountability cannot only ask whether commitments were delivered. It must also ask under what conditions they were delivered, who carried the burden of delivery, who had access to resources and decision-making, and whose forms of knowledge were treated as evidence. A feminist accountability framework must therefore measure not only outputs, but power, process, redistribution, care, and the quality of participation.

What this taught us: accountability frameworks are necessary, but they must keep evolving to meaningfully measure not only delivery, but also power, process, access, care, and redistribution.

4. BURNOUT AND THE INVISIBILITY OF EMOTIONAL LABOR

Feminist climate organizing is relational work. It is also relentless work, and the personal cost of that relentlessness has rarely been documented honestly within institutional settings. Young feminists from FFF MAPA entered multilateral spaces not just as advocates but as people carrying the lived-in weight of climate injustice from their own communities. We negotiated policy language while processing climate grief. We wrote commitments and delivered programs while navigating visa denials, funding rejections, and the ongoing experience of being underestimated. A dialogue convened under the Feminist Movements and Leadership Action Coalition, bringing together FACJ youth leaders to reflect on the realities of participation, resourcing, and power, surfaced what many of us had experienced individually: that the emotional labor of representing frontline communities in spaces not built for them is enormous, largely invisible, and almost entirely uncompensated and finally provided us a space to reflect on this. It can also be analysed that it is a cyclical repetition within multilateral international spaces that are severely restricted due to global funding dynamics of the public sector. Thus, it trickles down from high level institutions all the way down to the grassroots pushing the funding and capacity gap forward to each actor.

The care infrastructure that feminist movements have always recognized as essential (rest, collective processing, non-extractive pacing) was structurally absent from how the GEF expected its youth leaders to operate and despite dialogues like this which were most welcome, the systemic approach to how to work through this needs deeper thinking.

This is part of why rotational leadership became not just a feminist principle but a practical necessity. By distributing institutional memory across the co-conveners' board rather than concentrating it in one or two individuals, we tried to build a structure in which the work did not require personal sacrifice as its price of admission.

We did not fully solve this problem. Naming it here is important because future young feminists entering these spaces deserve to know that exhaustion is not a personal failure. It is a structural condition, and it needs to be addressed as one.

Future feminist climate governance must take burnout and collective leadership structures of partners and support this seriously as an accountability issue. This means designing participation with realistic timelines, accessible processes, funded coordination, mental health and care supports, and leadership models that allow people to step back without the work collapsing. Movements should not have to prove their commitment without this support.

What this taught us: burnout is not an individual weakness. It is a signal that systems must be redesigned around care, shared leadership, and sustainable participation.

5. VISA AS A FORM OF APARTHEID

Whilst strides have been made in terms of accessibility, accreditation, and training on negotiations, a major hurdle that feminists, especially from the Global South, have had to endure is the rejection of visas to Global North countries. As Kukathas (2015)[18] argues, immigration controls function similarly to apartheid in that they restrict the freedom of movement of some while creating cumulative systems of exclusion that deepen inequality. This is usually after going through immense obstacles in acquiring funding, learning technical language, gaining accreditation, and facing relentless rejection, all of which require significant labour and emotional endurance. Whilst institutions such as the UNFCCC try to waive visa fees and set up visa desks, these are hardly helpful to feminists, especially after facing rejections that come even after travelling, ensuring all documents are in line with the requirements, and making the financial sacrifices needed to access these spaces. Women who are single, unmarried, or self-employed can face intense questioning. Visa application centres are themselves placed in areas (if not abroad) that are gentrified and made palatable to international expats, meaning that travelling to these centres from rural areas where many feminists are based is an immense financial burden in itself.

The result is that we are left excluded, poorer, and more marginalised, as we cannot effectively participate, collaborate, nor network with our feminist siblings.

What this taught us: Most UN conferences being located in western countries, i.e Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)[19] which takes place in New York creates a divide amongst feminist organizers as those from the global south, colonised territories, with weak passports are pushed to the margins through border regimes. Whilst we take necessary measures and prepare well in advance logistically to ensure meaningful participation, this issue calls for a much more deeper reflection and reform, such as bringing conferences and meetings to global south countries, challenging border regimes, and easing visa access to meeting attendees.

These challenges did not define the limits of our leadership; they clarified the conditions needed for it to thrive. They pushed us to develop new ways of working: rotational leadership, autonomous documentation, bridge-building, feminist accountability, and collective care. In this sense, the challenges were not separate from the successes. They were part of the terrain through which young feminist climate leadership became more strategic, more collective, and more politically grounded.

SUCCESSES

1. POLICY WINS

One of the most significant transformations of our collective journey has been our ability to move from participating in multilateral processes to actively influencing them. Over the past six years, young feminist climate justice leaders have developed the political, technical, and strategic capacity needed to shape policy discussions across global gender and climate governance spaces.

Our engagement has spanned the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)[20] and its annual Conference of Parties (COP)[21], as well as other multilateral processes where decisions on gender equality and climate justice are negotiated. Throughout these spaces, our objective has been to ensure that global policies reflect the lived realities, priorities, and solutions of women, girls, young people, Indigenous peoples, pastoralist communities, and those living on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

A. INFLUENCING THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

A defining moment of our collective advocacy came during the 66th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66), where the priority theme focused on "Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes". Together, Fridays For Future MAPA, Wild Heart Kenya, Spring of the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (SASAL), Engajamundo, and Tejiendo Pensamiento played a central role in ensuring that young perspectives shaped the negotiations. Our collective work included convening consultations from community to regional levels to gather youth perspectives and co-led the development of the Youth and Adolescents' Recommendation for CSW66. We also coordinated advocacy efforts before and during negotiations and engaged with Member States and civil society partners to strengthen ambition within the Agreed Conclusions.

As a result of this collective advocacy, we contributed to advancing stronger agreed language on gender -responsive climate finance, leadership of young people in climate action, rights of women farmers, the protection of environmental and human rights defenders, including environmental journalists, and the importance of integrating gender equality across climate and environmental policies.

As Fridays For Future MAPA, we have continued to support climate negotiations and advocacy across subsequent sessions of the CSW, contributing climate expertise to discussions on issues including technology and digital rights, finance, care economies and more. Over time, we have become trusted partners within the feminist spaces, supporting allied Member States, UN entities, and civil society organizations in strengthening language on climate justice and ensuring that environmental issues remain integrated across the broader gender equality agenda.

B. INFLUENCING CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS AT THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

Our advocacy has also extended to the Conference of Parties (COP) under the UNFCCC. Together with UN Women and partners of the Action Coalition, we co-convened and facilitated numerous high-level dialogues addressing issues including the Gender Action Plan, climate finance, gender-disaggregated data, and just transition. These events created opportunities for young feminists to shape the agenda, facilitate political dialogues, and position feminist climate justice as a central component of international climate policy.

Through the support of the Action Coalition, we also engaged directly with government representatives through bilateral meetings with countries including the Nordic Council, the United Kingdom, and Costa Rica, among others. These engagements enabled us to elevate youth-led priorities, strengthen partnerships, and advocate directly for ambitious commitments.

WHK and SASAL have also contributed to the development of the UN Women publication, **Feminist Climate Justice: A Framework for Action**[22], which was launched at UNFCCC COP28.

C. BUILDING TECHNICAL CAPACITY

Our greatest policy achievement that often gets invisibilized is building the technical capacity of young feminists to engage confidently in multilateral negotiations. Over the past six years, we have collectively developed expertise in interpreting negotiation texts, understanding UN-agreed language and legal frameworks, navigating political processes, developing advocacy strategies, and translating complex negotiations into accessible knowledge for movements and communities. This growing expertise enabled us to contribute meaningfully alongside UN Youth Delegates, support coordinated civil society advocacy as co-convener of the Young Feminist Caucus, and engage within broader feminist coalitions such as the Women's Rights Caucus.

Importantly, we have never viewed this knowledge as something to be held by a select few who have proximity to spaces such as the United Nations. In keeping with our feminist methodologies, we have actively shared these skills through feminist teach-ins, training, mentorship, and capacity-building programmes. This ensures that future generations of young feminists can enter these spaces with more confidence and stronger political analysis.

2. FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDING & BREAKING GLASS CEILINGS

One of our greatest successes has not been just a couple of policy victories and interventions in international conferences. It has also been our contribution to strengthening feminist movements themselves.

Movement building is often simplified into a positive light, but in reality it is complex, imperfect, and deeply relational. It required navigating power dynamics, institutional barriers, competing priorities, and the inevitable tensions that arise when diverse organizations and communities come together. Feminist movements are not built because they are easy, rather, they are built because we choose to invest in the difficult work of collective leadership, accountability, trust, and solidarity.

Throughout our journey, we made a conscious decision to invest our time and political energy in this work. We believed that transforming institutions could never happen without first strengthening movements that engage with them. This commitment led us to contribute to the revitalization of the Young Feminist Caucus[23], helping create stronger pathways for young feminists to shape political agendas and engage more meaningfully with multilateral processes.

Our presence in international spaces was never intended to be a one-off appearance for symbolic representation. Instead, we treated participation as a sustained practice of feminist leadership. Every negotiation attender, partnerships built, and space we entered became an opportunity to strengthen our own organizations as well as the wider movement around us.

As Fridays For Future MAPA, we were entrusted by one of the world's largest youth climate movements to bring feminist analysis and leadership into the movement itself. At the same time, we built relationships across the feminist ecosystem. These relationships opened doors not only for us, but for countless other young feminists, creating new opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, political organizing, fundraising, and shared learning.

Breaking glass ceilings was never about becoming the exception. It was about ensuring that, once the ceiling was broken, it could never be rebuilt. Hence, ensuring that the spaces we entered with difficulties have now been opened up to a generation of young feminist leaders. Perhaps this is one of the clearest examples of what feminist movement building can achieve.

The successes documented here should not be read as simple wins detached from struggle. They emerged through under-resourced labour, difficult negotiations, collective care, and the refusal of young feminists to accept symbolic inclusion as enough. This is why they matter: because they show that even within imperfect systems, young feminist climate leaders built power, shifted narratives, created methodologies, and expanded the political imagination of feminist climate justice.

MULTILATERALISM: ENTERING, NAVIGATING, AND TRANSFORMING THE SYSTEM AS YOUNG FEMINISTS AND CLIMATE ACTIVISTS

For many young feminists and climate justice activists, multilateralism had long felt distant, opaque, and inaccessible. The global decision-making spaces were not designed with youth, feminists, nor frontline communities in mind, particularly those from the Global South and climate-affected communities. Yet, through the GEF and the leadership of UN Women, a new, imperfect but critical entry point was brought.

It was through this opening that young feminist climate activists, particularly from FFF MAPA, WHK, and SASAL, began leading in multilateral climate governance. Our engagement was political, technical, and rooted in frontline realities.

Through our collective work, we engaged across the three Rio Conventions:

1. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
2. The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD)
3. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Across these spaces, we brought forward lived experiences from communities facing climate collapse, biodiversity loss, land degradation, and gender injustices, while also advancing concrete political demands.

Our multilateral engagement has also been formally documented through UN Women's working paper "***Gender-Responsive Synergies Across the Rio Conventions: Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives***". For FFF MAPA, this meant elevating MAPA voices within climate negotiations and linking climate justice to gender justice, historical responsibilities, and colonial legacies. For WHK, this meant grounding global environmental commitments in community-based conservation solutions, women's leadership, and ecological care. For SASAL, this meant bringing forward the lived expertise on land restoration, food systems, and climate resilience, ensuring that policies reflect the realities of communities living at the edge of climate survival, especially pastoralists.

Through our engagement across the Rio Conventions, we also proved the critical truth that those closest to the crisis are also closest to the solutions. What changed through this engagement was not only our access to multilateral spaces, but our ability to read them. We learned how agendas are set, how language is negotiated, how alliances are formed, and how decisions are shaped both inside and outside formal rooms. This political literacy became one of the most important outcomes of our multilateral engagement.

This was one of the most important political shifts.

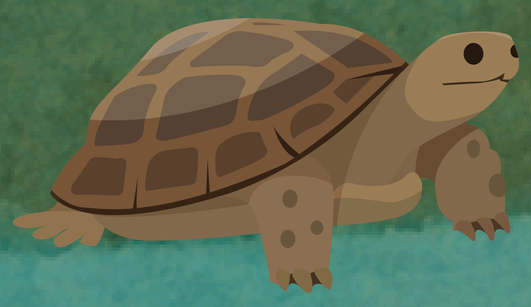
Multilateralism stopped being only a distant institutional space and became a terrain that young feminists could learn, interpret, contest, and use. We did not enter these spaces simply to be included within them. We entered to understand how power moved, to challenge the terms of debate, and to create openings for others. The shift was not only from exclusion to participation, but from participation to political literacy and collective strategy.

At the same time, access to multilateral spaces was never only about being invited. It depended on practical and political conditions: accreditation, visas, travel funding, interpretation, internet access, time zones, preparation calls, and the ability to take time away from community work. These conditions shaped who could enter, who could stay, and who could meaningfully influence the process. For young feminist and frontline climate leaders, navigating multilateralism, therefore, meant navigating both formal political spaces and the hidden infrastructure that determines participation.

BEING THE FIRST: YOUNG FEMINIST CLIMATE LEADERSHIP IN AN OLDER SYSTEM

When we entered these multilateral spaces, especially at the gender-climate intersection, they were overwhelmingly dominated by older actors and long-established organizations. Despite the urgency and relevance of our work, as young feminists, we were rarely in the room, and even if we were in the room, our meaningful engagement was not guaranteed. We encountered tokenism and the constant need to prove our expertise. We also had to navigate several unspoken hierarchies and the need for institutional legitimacy. However, we did not enter these spaces alone; we entered them as a collective. Together, we built technical expertise in negotiations, policy language, and strategic advocacy, including lobbying governments and UN entities. We also slowly developed the confidence to intervene, challenge, and propose alternatives. In a system that rewarded individual voices, we learned to move together and build collaborative leadership models. In a system resistant to change, we learned to bend it towards justice. This collective approach allowed us not only to survive multilateralism, but also to reshape how young feminist leadership is perceived from within.

Being among the first also meant learning in public; with mistakes, uncertainty, and hesitation were part of the process. Over time, we became more fluent in the system without becoming absorbed by it. We learned when to use institutional language, when to challenge it, and when to bring movement language into spaces that had not made room for it before.



THE YOUNG FEMINIST CAUCUS: MOBILIZING COLLECTIVE POWER AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the most significant feminist interventions in multilateral engagement was the creation of the Young Feminist Caucus[24], a global collective of young feminists working to influence UN spaces, including UN Women-led processes.

FFF MAPA serves as a co-convener of the Young Feminist Caucus, contributing to leadership, coordination, and bringing in our climate justice expertise. Through the caucus, young feminists did not just participate, but challenged institutional norms, held UN Women accountable, and introduced new methodologies for working meaningfully with young people. Through the Young Feminist Manifesto[25], we demanded youth be treated as co-creators and not just beneficiaries and advocated for structural shifts in how UN Women engages with young feminists. We also created safety nets and feminist collective and care spaces for political strategy and strengthened youth access to multilateral platforms.

The Caucus mattered because it prevented multilateral engagement from becoming an individualizing experience. It created a space where young feminists could interpret what was happening, prepare together, share intelligence, process difficult moments, and turn individual access into collective strategy.

It also became a space for political translation. Young feminists used the Caucus to make sense of institutional processes, decode technical language, understand where decisions were being made, and identify moments where collective intervention was possible. This was especially important for those entering UN and multilateral spaces for the first time, because access alone does not guarantee influence. Influence requires preparation, shared analysis, trust, and the ability to act together.

The Caucus also strengthened feminist accountability from the youth side. It created a mechanism through which young feminists could collectively reflect on whether institutional engagement was meaningful, whether commitments to youth leadership were being acted upon, and whether participation was becoming extractive or tokenistic. In this sense, the Caucus was not only a platform for advocacy; it was a space of collective discernment, care, and accountability.

For FFF MAPA, co-convening the Caucus helped connect climate justice advocacy with broader young feminist agendas, including bodily autonomy, economic justice, civic space, care, and accountability. This mattered because climate justice could not be treated as a standalone issue. Through the Caucus, feminist climate leadership was situated within a wider political struggle for structural transformation, allowing young feminists to build solidarity across movements rather than working in thematic silos.

SHAPING CSW66: YOUNG FEMINIST LEADERSHIP ON CLIMATE JUSTICE

At CSW66[26], where climate change was the priority theme, young feminists played a critical role in shaping advocacy and outcomes. FFF MAPA, alongside SASAL, WHK, and Engajamundo, co-led the development of the **Youth and Adolescents Recommendations for CSW66** along with other youth stakeholders. This process centered climate, ecological, and gender justice as inseparable and reflected on realities of frontline communities suffering the most adverse impacts of climate change. As young feminist climate leaders, we played an extensive role in lobbying, advocating, and strategically influencing the negotiation outcomes. This demonstrated the capacity of young feminists in influencing formal UN outcomes.

CSW66 was also a learning ground in how feminist climate demands move through formal processes: from community realities to collective recommendations, from recommendations to advocacy messages, and from advocacy messages into negotiation spaces. It taught us that influence is rarely immediate or linear. It is built through preparation, repetition, coalition work, and the ability to hold political clarity through compromise.

The process also showed the importance of translating lived realities into language that could travel across institutions without losing its political edge. Young feminists had to move between movement spaces, youth constituencies, Member State advocacy, UN processes, and negotiated language. This required not only technical skill, but political judgment: knowing when to insist, when to build alliances, when to hold the line, and when to keep pushing after a formal outcome had been adopted.

For FFF MAPA and other youth climate leaders, CSW66 helped build confidence that young feminists could engage not only as speakers or advocates, but as actors capable of shaping process, content, and strategy. It became part of the institutional memory that this Manifesto seeks to preserve. It was also pioneering for other youth across thematic expertise to learn from our experience.

PASSING THE TORCH

What we learned from navigating multilateralism was never meant to stay just with us. The technical language, the informal power dynamics, the negotiation strategies, the moments of resistance and care – these are all forms of knowledge that must be passed forward.

This manifesto is not only a reflection, but it is also a torch. It exists so that future young feminists entering climate and gender diplomacy do not have to start from scratch, do not have to navigate alone, and do not have to prove their worth repeatedly. Passing the torch means documenting not only what we achieved, but how we learned to move — making visible the practical knowledge that is often left undocumented.

This expands from how to prepare for a negotiation, how to read a room, how to build alliances, how to intervene with confidence, how to recover after exclusion, and how to remain accountable to movements while engaging institutions.

However, it also means refusing the isolation that multilateral systems often produce since each generation of young feminists should not have to re-learn the same lessons alone or pay the same emotional, political, and material costs to enter these spaces. By documenting our experiences, strategies, mistakes, and methods, we offer future young feminists not a fixed blueprint, but a starting point. This is the legacy we hope to leave: not only stronger language in policy documents, but stronger pathways for young feminists to enter, question, influence, and transform the systems that shape climate and gender justice.

We entered multilateralism to change it, and we leave behind tools so others can go further.



CENTRAL MODELS: EXAMINING FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES AND HOW YOUNG FEMINISTS ARE REBUILDING THE ARCHITECTURE FROM WITHIN

Over the last five years within the GEF ecosystem, young feminists did far more than participate, we invented new ways of leading, collaborating, and transforming a space that was never built for us. The climate and gender multilateralism were structured through traditional power hierarchies, we continued to witness youth engagement welcomed symbolically, but rarely treated as shared power.

And yet, through navigating these barriers, we developed feminist methodologies to reshape the space dynamics. These methodologies were born from necessity, care, and imagination. They were created collectively, tested through lived experiences, and refined through struggle. Hence, these methodologies serve as a foundation for future young feminists entering gender and climate diplomacy, offering tools to not just engage with institutions and partners but to transform it.

The methodologies documented here are political methods. They emerged because young feminists understood that inclusion alone would not transform systems. They allowed young feminists to challenge hierarchy not only through what they demanded, but through how they organized, shared space, produced knowledge, and sustained one another.

They are not abstract principles. They are practical tools for redistributing power, sustaining movements, building intergenerational trust, documenting impact, and ensuring that those closest to the crisis shape the solutions. Each methodology below can be read through four questions: what it is, why it matters, how it was practiced, and what institutions and movements should learn from it.

1. ROTATIONAL LEADERSHIP

In a system that expects one young person to represent all youth, we tried to flip the narrative that youth are not a monolith and representation should not trap us in tokenism. Instead, we designed and practised a rotational leadership model as a feminist alternative to hierarchical representation. Through this structure, it created space for new voices to enter, old voices to rest, and collective wisdom to grow.

Rotational leadership matters because it challenges the idea that representation should rest on one visible young person or one organization.

In multilateral spaces, this model helped prevent tokenism, reduce burnout, and create pathways for more young feminists to build confidence, institutional memory, and political voice over time.

This methodology ensured that:

- Power is shared, not concentrated
- Multiple realities and lived experiences are represented over time
- Capacity and institutional memory are distributed, not held by one person
- Care is centered, preventing burnout and emotional exhaustion
- Knowledge is collective, not personal
- Leadership becomes a pathway, not a position.

What institutions should learn: meaningful youth leadership cannot depend on repeatedly calling on the same few young people. Institutions should design processes that allow leadership to rotate, knowledge to be transferred, and new leaders to be supported before, during, and after their engagement.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE MOVEMENT

"Rotational leadership is not a loss of power; it is the multiplication of it. When there is transparency and decision-making spaces are open to young people, giving girls the ability to make decisions from the grassroots, and building their confidence. Ensuring that young people are not just participants or just means of adding numbers to data on young people's presence, but their full involvement and participation. By mentoring young girls and fostering capacity-building, transferring and sharing knowledge, rationalizing leadership, strengthening their voices, and building trust in their ability to lead and drive changes from the grassroots to global platforms. True leadership is not about holding the chair forever; it is about passing it on so women and girls can lead boldly, unapologetically, and powerfully.

The opportunities and sisterhood shared by FFF MAPA has been a confidence booster for young climate and gender justice advocates to raise their voices and represent their communities, without fear but full of confidence".

- Husna Khan, WHK

REFLECTIONS FROM THE MOVEMENT

"FFF MAPA is a mirror held up to global governance which is reflecting the communities these spaces have drawn invisible lines around. At the forefront of that exclusion have always been women, girls, and children. The ones least responsible for the crisis, most exposed to its consequences, and most systematically shut out from the decisions that shape their futures. We come from the Global South not as guests in these spaces but as the people living the realities being debated inside them. Rotational leadership was our political response to that reality; no single young person from the margins can or should carry the weight of representing us all. When we rotate leadership, we are not just sharing a seat; we are insisting that the full breadth of our communities, our women, our girls, our children, our elders, are visible and present. Our strength has always been collective, and so, our leadership must reflect that."

- Fatemah Sultan, FFF MAPA

"FFF MAPA brought us all together, both as young feminists and representatives of our individual grassroots organizations. In a space that felt exclusive with a lot of gatekeeping, we felt seen and our expertise recognized for the first time. We stood up in our own identity as SASAL and felt confident to bring in our lived experiences, expertise, and perspectives from the Arid and Semi-arid Lands. It resulted in designing our own commitment that is now making a groundbreaking impact and changing lives in Kenya's Maasai Land.

We don't forget how this space gave us visibility and saw us accessing a network of potential partners that are really crucial for our community-led work. This wouldn't have been possible without FFF MAPA and the practice of rotational leadership".

- Mana Omar, SASAL

2. BRIDGE-BUILDING FROM GRASSROOTS TO GLOBAL LEVEL

As FFF MAPA, we understood the global visibility attached to our name, but we also understood the gap between the global spotlight and local lived experiences. Feminist climate justice demanded that we redirected attention, access, and opportunity towards those doing the daily work of survival, care, and community resilience.

This is an important example of feminist leadership as redistribution. FFF MAPA used its access to expand the room, rather than consolidate visibility around itself. This should be named clearly because it is one of the Manifesto's strongest lessons: leadership is not only about occupying space, but about changing who else can enter, speak, decide, and lead.

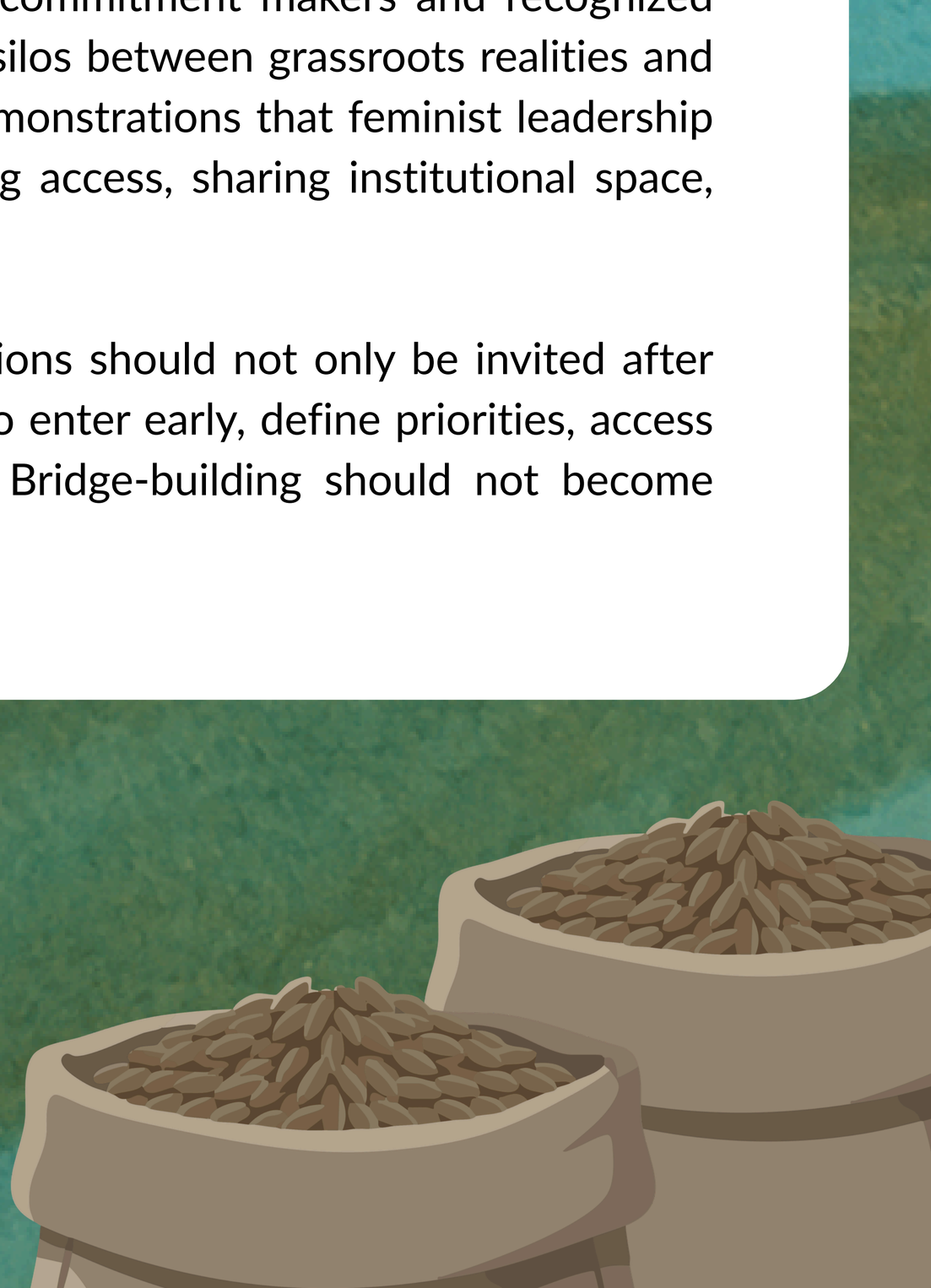
Our bridge-building methodology included:

- Identifying local young feminist climate groups seeking pathways to inclusion in being excluded from global policy spaces
- Actively creating pathways for them to enter through our platform
- Co-developing advocacy strategies instead of speaking on their behalf
- Deepening knowledge and resource sharing grounded in solidarity
- Gradual but purposeful autonomy, ensuring they become leaders in their own right

Through this methodology, we brought four grassroots young feminist climate groups into FACJ: Wild Heart Kenya (WHK), Spring of the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (SASAL), Engajamundo, and Tejiendo Pensamiento.

Instead of simply inviting them into the room, we prepared the room for their leadership. Over time, these groups evolved into independent commitment makers and recognized feminist climate leaders, breaking the long-standing silos between grassroots realities and global policymaking. This was one of the clearest demonstrations that feminist leadership is not about representation; it is about redistributing access, sharing institutional space, and uprooting gatekeeping systems.

What institutions should learn: grassroots organizations should not only be invited after agendas are already set. They should be supported to enter early, define priorities, access resources, and shape strategy in their own name. Bridge-building should not become gatekeeping; it should lead to autonomy.



REFLECTIONS FROM THE MOVEMENT

"Engajamundo is a youth-led Brazilian organization that does ground work with capacity-building programs, advocacy, and communications strategies. We were invited to join the Generation Equality Forum back in 2019, through FFF MAPA, not by the UN. That really shows how youth are united and coming together, sharing opportunities, resources, and political spaces.

We worked together, as one organization, until 2023, when we became a commitment maker on our own. We are very thankful for everything we learned and keep learning with our colleagues from FFF MAPA. You all are a significant part of the growth of our feminist environmental activism.

Years after this invitation, and already as a commitment maker, we had the pleasure to invite the ecofeminist Brazilian organization EmpoderaClima to join us on FACJ."

- Anne Heloise, Climate Justice Activist and Youth Leader
Engajamundo and Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition

3. INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Intergenerational work has always been a cornerstone of feminist movements. As FACJ youth leaders, we entered this space with deep respect for the elders who are guides and hold decades of institutional knowledge, political experience, and movement wisdom. We sought their mentorship, guidance, and grounding, understanding that our work is part of a much larger feminist struggle.

This methodology is important because intergenerational work can easily reproduce hierarchy if youth are treated as learners only, or elders are treated as the only holders of strategy and legitimacy. The FACJ experience showed that intergenerational solidarity is strongest when it is reciprocal: elders bring institutional memory and political experience, while young feminists bring analysis, urgency, digital organizing, movement fluency, and new ways of imagining accountability.

However, we also recognized that true feminist intergenerational solidarity is not hierarchical, rather built on reciprocity, care, curiosity, and mutual recognition of the strengths that each generation brings.

Our methodology, therefore, centered on co-creation and co-ownership, where elders and youth stand alongside each other as partners in strategy, imagination, and fight for our collective liberation.

This methodology reshaped relationships with older organizations by:

- Engaging with young feminists as equal partners
- Young feminists offering strategy, political analysis, and solutions, not just “youth perspectives”
- Modeling reliability, expertise, and accountability
- Challenging stereotypes that youth are unprepared or uninformed
- Inspiring elder-led organizations to shift their structures to genuinely integrate youth leadership.

What institutions should learn: intergenerational leadership should be designed into structures, not left to informal goodwill. This means co-chairing, shared agenda-setting, mentorship in both directions, and recognizing youth as strategic actors rather than future leaders waiting their turn.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE MOVEMENT

“Intergenerational solidarity is a journey that starts with breaking down norms that serve as participation barriers. In my first few months working with the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition, at Stockholm +50 we convened an open intergenerational dialogue. FACJ youth leaders facilitated direct discussion amongst fellow youth, government, and NGO representatives. While such a format took some out of their comfort zone, it laid foundations for trust and transparency that hugely advanced collaboration, leading to long-term real support for our work and each other and real action towards our mutual feminist climate justice goals.

Outside of such events, we saw a benefit to intergenerational partnerships to envision, lead, plan, and implement collaborations. We paired youth and non-youth FACJ leaders to chair our different areas of activity, such as designing workshops to build the capacity of grassroots women-led organizations. This approach disrupted a common tendency to turn over leadership by youth to a limited set of activities, which we noticed often led to those activities being somewhat siloed. By facilitating intergenerational co-leadership, such siloeing was strongly reduced and our teams were more collaborative”.

- Rosalind Helfand, Independent Environmental Policy Consultant

4. FEMINIST ACCOUNTABILITY

Feminist accountability emerged as one of the most critical methodologies we developed over the last five years, because while institutions expressed a desire to work with young people, it became increasingly clear that youth inclusion was often the spirit and not the action. This realization catalyzed a historic moment for young feminist organizing. The creation of the Young Feminist Manifesto[27], collectively authored by youth constituencies. The manifesto was not an act of opposition but an act of feminist accountability. It was named with clarity and care where the GEF and its stakeholders, including UN Women, were falling short in their engagement with young feminists. At the same time, it proposed a tangible way forward rooted in co-leadership, co-creation, and co-ownership. The manifesto is a testament to young feminists coming together not only to critique systems of power, but to offer solutions grounded in feminist values. The Young Feminist Manifesto set a precedent for strengthening the trust and collaboration among youth movements, UN Women, and other stakeholders.

This methodology shifted accountability from a technical reporting exercise to a political and relational practice. It asked not only whether commitments were delivered, but also who had power, who had resources, who carried the burden of delivery, whose knowledge counted, and whether participation itself was meaningful or extractive.

This work continued through the development of the GEF Accountability Framework[28], a formal mechanism designed to track progress and commitments across Action Coalitions. FFF MAPA was one of the youth organizations deeply involved in shaping this framework, ensuring that youth perspectives were embedded from the onset. A key contribution we brought into this process was the decolonial understanding of accountability, one that recognizes historical power, uneven access to resources, and the realities faced by organizations operating in crisis-affected and under-resourced contexts. The Accountability Framework also institutionalized annual reporting by Action Coalition commitment makers, creating new pathways for transparency and accountability within the GEF structure.

However, through our engagement in these processes, we learnt that institutions evaluate success differently from movements, including a communication gap as an unrecognized tension point between these actors. We also noted significant gaps in qualitative data, storytelling, and lived experiences, particularly the absence of spaces to reflect on what did not work and the lessons learnt. For us, feminist accountability meant grounding ourselves in a radical but necessary truth: we have not failed, if we have learnt.

FFF MAPA, alongside youth partners such as SASAL and WHK, continues to explore and evolve feminist accountability as a living practice. It is a part of relationship building that is informed by solidarity, care, and shared responsibility. We see feminist accountability as integrity, transparency, and collective growth.

It is about ensuring that systems claiming to support gender and climate justice are continuously reshaped by those they seek to serve.

What institutions should learn: accountability must include young feminists not only as respondents or data providers, but as co-designers of what is measured, how it is measured, and what forms of evidence are treated as legitimate.

For future young feminists navigating global spaces, this methodology is an offering and a reminder that accountability is not passively experienced; it is something we practice together, for justice, aiming at our collective liberation.

5. COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND DOCUMENTATION

We learnt early on that institutions rarely document youth leadership accurately. Our work is at risk of being erased. This is why we developed a feminist practice of autonomous documentation, gathering our own narratives, data, timelines, and achievements. We also found and built allies in the system who would support and collaborate to strengthen our leadership and also ensured some of us found ways to be engaging formally with systems

This ensured that:

- Youth-led knowledge is preserved
- Our contributions are not rewritten or sidelined
- Impact measurement is defined by us and not imposed on us
- Future generations inherit movement memory

The present manifesto itself is an extension of this methodology.

What institutions should learn: documentation should not be extractive. Young feminist movements should have ownership over how their work is narrated, what counts as impact, and how their political contributions are archived. Documentation is not only communication; it is power, memory, and accountability.

6. HONORING AND UPLIFTING DIVERSE KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

At the core of our feminist practice is the understanding that youth are not a monolith, and neither is our knowledge. Young feminist climate leadership is shaped by vastly different lived realities, histories, and ways of knowing. Among us are Indigenous youth, pastoralist youth, LGBTQI+ youth, grassroots organizers, community mobilizers, policy advocates, negotiators, researchers, and youth working inside multilateral institutions. Each carries a form of expertise that is rooted in experience, struggle, and practice.

Our methodology intentionally rejected the hierarchy of knowledge that dominates global governance spaces where institutional proximity is automatically equated with expertise, and where working inside UN system is implicitly valued above organizing in communities.

We refused this false binary. Rather, we worked on affirming that:

- Grassroots knowledge is not inferior to policy knowledge
- Lived experience is not less valuable than technical language
- Indigenous and local wisdom is not secondary to institutional frameworks
- Movement-building and policy-building are complementary, not competing forms of leadership

This methodology was especially important because young feminist climate leadership sits across many forms of expertise: community knowledge, Indigenous and pastoralist ecological knowledge, negotiation literacy, care work, organizing practice, research, and lived experience. Rather than ranking these forms of knowledge, we treated them as complementary and necessary.

This feminist approach reshaped how we worked together. It allowed us to lead with humility, to step forward when our expertise was needed, and to step back when others were better positioned to lead. Leadership became fluid, contextual, and responsive, rather than fixed.

By honoring diverse knowledge systems, we cultivated a collective practice grounded in:

- Deep listening and mutual learning
- Shared ownership of strategy and vision
- Respect across differences in experiences, access, and positions
- Intentional uplifting of voices that are often marginalized, even within youth spaces.

This methodology ensured that we always entered spaces as a group, not as competing experts. It strengthened trust and solidarity, and allowed us to navigate complex multilateral and grassroots spaces without reproducing the very hierarchies we were trying to dismantle. It reminds us that transformation does not come from a single way of knowing but from many truths and nuances held together. Honoring diverse knowledge systems is not only a methodology, but it is also part of feminist ethics; one that future young feminists must carry forward.

What institutions should learn: expertise should not be defined only by proximity to formal institutions, academic language, or technical policy spaces. Global climate governance must recognize community-rooted knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, youth organizing knowledge, and lived experience as evidence.



7. FEMINIST CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION

A feminist approach to restoration begins with the recognition that ecological degradation, climate collapse, and gender injustice are deeply intertwined, shaped by histories of colonization, extractive development, and patriarchal control over land and bodies. Women and gender diverse people, particularly at the frontline, and Indigenous communities have long maintained relationships of care with the ecosystems.

In many regions, their survival, livelihoods, and cultural continuity are often directly tied to forests, land, water, and biodiversity. Yet, conservation efforts have historically excluded them, criminalized their practices, or extracted their labour without recognition or power. Our feminist methodology for conservation and restoration is to intentionally challenge this legacy. We also reject conservation models that treat nature as separate from people instead of approaching restoration through a climate justice and social justice lens. This means that we recognize the interdependence between humans and other beings, affirming the principles of the Rights of Nature. According to them, ecosystems are living entities that connect value and are deserving of care, legal protection as a subject of rights, and respect.

This methodology is grounded in the understanding that restoration is not only ecological repair; it is also social, political, and gendered repair. It asks who has been excluded from decisions about land and biodiversity, whose labour has sustained ecosystems without recognition, and how restoration can create pathways for women and girls to exercise agency, leadership, and economic power.

All women's and girls' relationship to land and ecosystems is often framed through care, but our narrative of feminist conservation insists that care must come with power, agency, and resources.

Our methodology actively calls for:

- Engaging women and girls as decision-makers in restoration projects
- Ensuring their access to land, resources, and its governance
- Valuing unpaid and informal environmental and agricultural labour
- Creating economic, social, and political pathways for women and girls through restoration work
- Involving girls and young women early in restoration efforts to cultivate intergenerational ecological knowledge and leadership.
- Safeguarding knowledge systems associated with ecosystem restoration, including ancestral, community based, and Indigenous knowledge linked to sustainable agricultural practices, seed stewardship, water conservation, and traditional ways of relating to the land.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE MOVEMENT

INDIGENOUS PASTO WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS: A HISTORICAL MEMORY FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

-Tejiendo Pensamiento (TP), Alejandra Quiguantar

In the South-Western part of the department of Nariño, Colombia, lies the ancestral territory of the Indigenous Pasto people, a region of high biodiversity that brings together Andean, Amazonian, and Pacific ecosystems. This territory, located in the Nudo de la Huaca and forming a binational area by sharing borders with the Republic of Ecuador, is not merely a geographical space, but a living web of spiritual, cultural, and ecological relationships governed by the law of origin and the worldview of the myth of the two partridges – a pillar that organizes community life and the relationship with nature. The population has been primarily dedicated to agriculture and livestock farming, which constitute the basis of the territory's own economy.

In this context, Indigenous Pasto women occupy a central role in biodiversity conservation and the defense of their territory. Their knowledge systems constitute a living historical memory that ensures the continuity of community processes. These forms of knowledge, transmitted from generation to generation, are part of the natural law of the Pasto people and sustain an ethical, caring relationship with all forms of life that inhabit the territory.

Today, these ways of life are seriously threatened by the climate crisis, which manifests through prolonged droughts, intense frosts, and increasingly frequent floods. Such changes not only affect crops and biodiversity, but also deepen the social and economic inequalities that Indigenous women have historically faced. In this scenario, the knowledge of Pasto women emerges as concrete, situated, and effective responses to biodiversity loss and as a commitment to environmental justice.

Through the community work of Tejiendo Pensamiento, Indigenous Pasto women are recognized as fundamental pillars in the knowledge, protection, and care of biodiversity. Beyond the reproductive roles imposed by a colonial and utilitarian perspective, women are seed guardians, healers, climate observers, and caretakers of community life. Their knowledge enables them to identify the diversity of species that inhabit the mountains and forests, understand their healing properties, and ensure their responsible use as the foundation of food sovereignty in their households.

The self-care practices promoted by Pasto women integrate the use of medicinal plants that heal both the body and the spirit. Among them is *Brugmansia sanguinea*, known as *guanto*, considered a sacred plant within ceremonial spaces. Likewise, in community gatherings, dialogues, and workshops, the use of protective plants and herbal baths is essential for the spiritual and collective harmonization of the organizational processes developed through Tejiendo Pensamiento.

Research conducted by TP shows that adult women possess extensive knowledge related to wildlife and climate phenomena. The observation of birds, such as swallows, makes it possible to anticipate the arrival of rain, while the intensity of the sun during the day warns of the possible occurrence of frost at night. This local meteorological knowledge is fundamental for decision-making related to planting, harvesting, and crop protection.

There is also a close relationship between the lunar calendar and crop management, as well as deep knowledge in recognizing the species present in the *shagra*, an ancestral agricultural system that brings together biodiversity, food, and knowledge.

Within the framework of monitoring páramo ecosystems, the presence of species categorized as threatened has been identified, such as the mountain *Tapir (Tapirus pinchaque)*, classified as Endangered (EN) according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), indicating that it faces a very high risk of extinction in the wild. This finding reinforces the urgency of strengthening local environmental conservation programs that integrate the ancestral knowledge of Indigenous women as a central axis of biodiversity protection strategies. The work has been presented at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Therefore, denying the role of Indigenous women in climate action means disregarding one of the most solid, sustained, and ethically profound responses to the global environmental crisis. For this reason, programmatic agendas, public policies, and decision-making spaces must recognize and strengthen their leadership. The effective participation of Indigenous Pasto women is not a symbolic act, but an indispensable condition for advancing toward genuine climate justice, the defense of collective rights, and the protection of biodiversity.

What institutions should learn: conservation and restoration programmes should not treat women and girls as beneficiaries of environmental projects. They should resource them as decision-makers, knowledge holders, land defenders, and leaders of ecological governance.

8. THE ENKANG' MODEL: FEMINIST CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND GENDER EQUALITY

A feminist approach to climate resilience recognizes that climate shocks, environmental stress, and gender inequities are deeply interconnected, shaped by historical marginalization, unequal power structures, and systemic barriers to participation. In pastoralist and rural communities, women, youth, and marginalized groups have long maintained knowledge and practices that sustain livelihoods, water systems, grazing lands, and ecological balance. Nonetheless, their voices are often excluded from decision-making, and their labor undervalued or unrecognized.

The Enkang' Model, developed by SASAL, is a community-centered methodology that integrates resilience, gender equality, and local knowledge into all aspects of adaptation planning and action. This model treats communities as active agents of change, rather than passive beneficiaries, and links climate resilience to social, economic, and governance transformation.

The Enkang' Model is important because it shows that climate resilience cannot be separated from gender equality, livelihoods, governance, and cultural transformation. It offers a community-rooted model for changing deeply held norms while also strengthening adaptation, economic autonomy, and ecological knowledge.

The methodology actively calls for:

- Engaging women, youth, and marginalized groups as decision-makers in resilience planning and implementation
- Ensuring equitable access to resources, land, water, and community governance structures
- Recognizing and valuing unpaid and informal labor in climate adaptation and natural resource management
- Creating economic, social, and political pathways for women and girls through climate resilience projects
- Incorporating intergenerational knowledge transfer, ensuring that youth and elders jointly contribute to ecological adaptation strategies
- Designing participatory, monitoring, and reflection processes, including tools like story circles, community mapping, and collective analysis, to document impact and inform adaptive action
- Centering care, agency, and collective leadership, ensuring that resilience is co-owned, inclusive, and sustainable

Through this feminist, community-driven approach, SASAL ensures that climate resilience work is intersectional, locally led, and transformative, linking environmental adaptation to gender justice, social equity, and long-term community autonomy.

What institutions should learn: climate resilience models should be locally led, gender-transformative, and accountable to the communities implementing them. They should support not only infrastructure and adaptation outcomes, but also shifts in power, voice, livelihoods, and social norms.

Taken together, these methodologies show that young feminist leadership is not only a question of representation. It is a practice of redesigning how power moves. Rotational leadership, bridge-building, intergenerational solidarity, feminist accountability, autonomous documentation, diverse knowledge systems, feminist restoration, and community-led resilience are not isolated activities. They are political methods that can guide future feminist climate governance. They offer institutions, movements, and funders a clear lesson: **meaningful engagement requires more than inviting young feminists into existing systems. It requires transforming the systems themselves so that leadership, knowledge, resources, and accountability are shared.**



FROM METHODOLOGIES TO PRACTICE: YOUNG FEMINIST SOLUTIONS ON THE FRONTLINES

WHY THESE CASE STUDIES MATTER

Throughout this Manifesto, we have documented the feminist methodologies, political strategies, and collective leadership practices that have shaped our journey over the past six years. Yet these methodologies were never intended to remain theoretical. They were developed to transform communities, shift systems, and build climate justice and gender equality from the ground up.

These two case studies featured in this chapter demonstrates that young people are already building resilient communities, restoring ecosystems, preserving Indigenous and pastoralist knowledge systems, influencing policy, and creating new models of climate leadership rooted in justice.

Despite operating with limited resources, these organizations continue to deliver transformative outcomes. This should never become the expectations. Instead, it should force us to ask: What more could young feminist leaders achieve if they were adequately resourced? The purpose of these case studies, therefore, is not simply celebratory rather demonstrates the immense opportunity the world risks losing when youth-led climate justice remains chronically underfunded.

METHODOLOGY

The case studies presented in this chapter were developed using Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR), a methodology that centers communities not as research subjects but as co-creators of knowledge. FPAR challenges traditional research approaches that often extract information from communities without returning ownership or agency. This approach was adapted from the work of the Gender and Environment Data Alliance (GEDA)[29] and its feminist methodologies for climate change research. This methodology allowed us to ask: What has changed? Who experienced that change? What have we learned? What knowledge emerged from the community? And how can this knowledge strengthen future action?

Through this, the case studies become more than just project evaluation and rather political narratives that reclaim the authority of young feminists to document, interpret, and define their own impact.

FEMINIST PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (FPAR) STUDY FINDINGS

STUDY BACKGROUND

Wild Heart Kenya is a youth- and women-led organization based on the Kenyan coast, working with coastal communities to advance gender-responsive climate action and biodiversity conservation. Our work is rooted in the belief that when women and young people lead, their leadership heals ecosystems.

Through nature and ecosystem restoration, we have worked hand in hand with coastal communities to restore degraded mangrove forests and replant indigenous trees, work that safeguards the environment while strengthening livelihoods. Over the past five years, our team and local partners have planted more than 50,000 mangroves in the Mkupe Conservancy and 500 indigenous and fruit trees across community spaces and schools, breathing new life into our coastlines.

As our impact grew, we wanted to understand how this work was transforming lives, restoring dignity, and shaping community resilience in the face of the climate crisis, not just through numbers, but through the lived experiences and voices of the people driving the change. That is what led us to undertake a Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) study, involving community members, especially women and youth, as co-researchers to document both environmental outcomes and the social and emotional dimensions of change: economic empowerment, gender equality, knowledge sharing, and the collective pride of reclaiming our natural heritage.

Our study was born from one question: what does climate justice look like when it is led by the people who live closest to its impact?

OUR PROCESS INVOLVED

1. Surveying the site and informing the community in advance of our intent to collect data, including what would be asked, consent, and data protection.
2. Co-designing research questions with the community to ensure inclusivity and local ownership.
3. Conducting Story Circles with women mangrove growers, held in familiar planting sites and facilitated in Swahili, to gather lived experiences of economic change, environmental awareness, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.
4. Recording these stories through audio-visual documentation with community members.
5. Administering surveys and community mapping to collect data on economic status, food security, education access, and biodiversity restoration.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Our findings point to tangible social, economic, and ecological transformation driven by community-led conservation:

- Although the project was introduced by the (male) community head, it was women who first accepted and championed mangrove planting.
- All participating women reported increased household income from the sale of mangrove seedlings.
- That income has improved women's access to menstrual products, supporting dignity and wellbeing.
- Fewer cases of child marriage have been reported, as parents can now afford to keep their daughters in school.
- Restoration has improved local fish populations, especially prawn stocks, which are sold to external markets for additional income.
- Young women report greater confidence and mental health benefits linked to increased greenery and environmental restoration.
- Young men were intentionally included in the program to help them understand the links between biodiversity conservation, gender equality, and climate change, ensuring shared awareness and shared benefits.
- Youth participants report reduced involvement in drug abuse and exploitative relationships, attributing this to their engagement in meaningful, community-based environmental work.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Over the past five years, Wild Heart Kenya's restoration initiatives have funded the purchase of 50,000 mangrove seedlings from the Mkupe Conservancy. All seedlings were sourced from a community nursery cared for by women and girls, channeling restoration spending directly back into the community.

This steady income has given women greater financial independence, enabling them to cover basic needs, including menstrual products, and improving their dignity and wellbeing.

"I come from a family that plants mangroves and engages in fishing. I have been planting for three years. Whenever there is an activity, I bring my brothers and friends, and it really helps prevent them from engaging in any drug-related cases." - Salma Juma, 23, Mkupe Conservancy

Salma Juma, 23, is a climate justice champion from a family engaged in fishing and mangrove planting. She has planted mangroves for three years and said the income lets her buy sanitary products without depending on anyone, a meaningful shift in a community where older men have been known to exploit young girls by offering sanitary products or money in exchange for favors. She also brings her siblings and friends to planting activities, keeping them engaged in environmental work and away from drug-related activity.



"Engaging with Wild Heart Kenya through capacity-building has really boosted my confidence, as I earn something and don't get lured into exploitation in any way, such as using weed or having to exchange sexual favors for sanitary pads." - Salma Juma, 23, Mkupe Conservancy

Women in the community have also benefited directly from seedling sales, using the income to contribute to household needs, cover their children's education, and reduce reliance on early marriage as an economic strategy for their daughters.

INCREASE IN FISH POPULATION

Mangroves serve as a breeding ground for fish, crabs, and other marine life, making them critical to the fishing economy and food chain. Before restoration and community efforts to stop unsustainable cutting, catches averaged just 1 to 2 kg on a good day. Five years into restoration, fish and prawn tonnage has increased substantially, supporting both household consumption and sales to high-end seafood markets.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that feminist, community-led approaches to climate action drive environmental regeneration alongside social justice and economic empowerment. The data and lived experiences from Kenya's coast show that when women and youth lead decision-making and action, the benefits ripple across families, ecosystems, and generations.

We call on policymakers, partners, and funders to financially support women- and youth-led grassroots organizations, because true climate justice begins with community.

FEMINIST PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (FPAR) STUDY FINDINGS

STUDY BACKGROUND

In Kenya, pastoralist groups endure the harshest climate impacts yet find themselves marginalized within policy-making arenas. Specifically, women within these communities face a uniquely gendered crisis, where environmental collapse intersects with rigid patriarchal systems, financial instability, and the heavy weight of uncompensated care duties.

Spring of the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (SASAL) partners with Indigenous pastoralists to foster climate-resilient futures and champion gender equity. Their mission centers on empowering these communities to anticipate and navigate ecological shocks while cultivating just and sustainable ways of life.

As a key contributor to the Generation Equality Forum and the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Coalition, SASAL is pioneering the **Enkang' Model for Climate Resilience and Gender Equality.** This innovative village concept serves as a living laboratory for achieving gender justice within a pastoralist cultural framework. By integrating clean water access, renewable energy, and climate-smart livelihoods, the Enkang' Model transforms feminist theory into tangible, community-led practice.

This research was undertaken to capture the lived realities of these women, positioning them not as passive recipients of aid, but as primary knowledge holders and agents of systemic transformation whose voices are essential to this Manifesto.

RESEARCH METHODS USED

1. **Story Circles:** Safe, collective environments where women voiced their personal encounters with ecological shifts and shared their survival strategies.
2. **Community Mapping:** Interactive exercises used to visualize how climate change alters water availability, local mobility, and social structures.
3. **Collective Reflection and Analysis:** Women acted as co-researchers, interpreting data to prioritize needs like localized water access, vocational training, and the protection of Indigenous wisdom.

RESEARCH PRINCIPLES

- Validating lived and Indigenous experiences as authoritative evidence.
- Dismantling traditional power hierarchies in the creation of knowledge.
- Elevating historically silenced voices within the global climate dialogue.
- Grounding empirical findings in feminist policy and collective action.

These insights have been distilled into a policy brief designed to influence the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan and wider global climate commitments.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Our study reveals that for pastoralist women, the climate crisis is a daily, embodied reality. Drought and livestock loss lead to deepening poverty and psychological strain, despite these women having the smallest carbon footprints.

Environmental shocks amplify the triple burden of labor — reproductive, productive, and emotional — often forcing women to travel longer distances for water without any social support. Economic precarity is high, as traditional micro-enterprises often fail during extreme weather events.

Men continue to dominate decision-making, leading to adaptation strategies that ignore women's specialized knowledge. However, women continue to build resilience through informal mutual aid and savings groups, even in the absence of formal childcare or emotional infrastructure.

The articulated demands of these women include reliable healthcare, financial inclusion, and a seat at the table in community governance. They seek a future defined by safety, dignity, and intergenerational justice, which are fundamental prerequisites for a transformative climate agenda.

Furthermore, SASAL's **Enkang' Model** proves that community-led initiatives can alleviate the care burden while fostering agency. This model highlights how feminist adaptation translates theoretical research into measurable improvements in daily life.

IMPACT OF THE ENKANG' MODEL

The Enkang' Model successfully bridges the gap between community priorities and practical climate action, resulting in significant gains in economic independence and overall wellbeing.

Vocational training in tailoring has equipped women with skills that diversify their income. For instance, **Deborah**, once entirely dependent on others, now earns **over USD 300 in monthly profits**, a transformation achieved in less than six months.

"Before this training, I had no means of my own. Today, I support my children and contribute to my household. Earning this income has restored my hope and given me a confidence I never imagined possible." - Deborah, Enkang' Tailoring Programme Beneficiary



Proximity to clean water has also radically altered the daily lives of women and girls. By installing resilient infrastructure, the time spent on water collection has been drastically reduced, allowing for education and leadership opportunities. **Noolari,** who once trekked **8 kilometers** every day, now finds water just **50 meters from her doorstep.**

"Fetching water used to exhaust my entire day. Now that the water point is only steps away, I have the time to care for my family and even consider starting my own small business." - Noolari, Enkang' Water Project Beneficiary

These successes demonstrate that when we invest in women-led, localized adaptation, we achieve more than just climate resilience—we advance the cause of economic and gender justice.



EVIDENCE OF CHANGE: THE ENKANG' MODEL FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND GENDER EQUALITY

The Enkang' Model demonstrates how community-led, feminist climate action can translate research findings into measurable improvements in the lives of pastoralist women and their communities. To date, the initiative has contributed to:

- **100 households** accessing clean water through climate-resilient water infrastructure, significantly reducing the time and distance women and girls travel to collect water.
- **75 women** trained in climate-resilient livelihood skills, including tailoring, beadwork, sustainable construction, photography, and entrepreneurship.
- **10 climate-resilient Manyattas** constructed, showcasing culturally appropriate and climate-adaptive housing.
- **500 people** benefiting from solar lighting, improving household safety, extending productive hours, and reducing reliance on unsustainable energy sources.
- **Climate-smart kitchen gardens** produce nutritious food for approximately **40 people daily**, strengthening household food security and nutrition.
- **An 8-kilometre reduction** in the average distance women travel to fetch water, allowing more time for education, income generation, caregiving, leadership, and community participation.

These results demonstrate that investing in Indigenous women-led, locally designed adaptation solutions delivers multiple benefits simultaneously strengthening climate resilience, reducing unpaid care work, improving livelihoods, enhancing food and water security, and advancing gender equality.



CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms that pastoralist women stand at the frontlines of the climate crisis, bearing the heaviest burdens while often remaining isolated from power. Yet, they are the vital stewards of community resilience and the primary holders of climate knowledge.

The findings emphasize the necessity of gender-transformative governance and feminist climate finance. The triumph of the **Enkang' Model** proves that centering women's priorities leads to tangible, sustainable results. True climate action requires moving beyond top-down interventions toward inclusive, feminist solutions that respect the sovereignty and lived expertise of pastoralist communities.

By documenting these realities, we aim to ensure that the priorities of pastoralist women reach the global platforms where finance and policy are decided. Investing in these proven, community-led models is the only way to achieve authentic climate justice.

ANALYSIS: WHAT THESE CASE STUDIES TEACH US

Although rooted in very different contexts, both case studies arrive at the same conclusion: climate solutions are strongest when communities are trusted to lead.

WILD HEART KENYA

WHK demonstrates that conservation cannot be separated from questions of history, justice, and power. Their work shows that environmental restoration must move beyond technical interventions toward decolonial conservation[30]- an approach that recognizes the sovereignty of Indigenous and local communities while restoring relationships between people and nature. As scholars have argued, colonial conservation has too often displaced Indigenous peoples and excluded them from governing the very ecosystems they have cared for over generations. Wild Heart Kenya's work offers an alternative rooted in ecofeminist decolonial principles, where restoration becomes an act of repairing both ecological systems and historical injustices.

SPRING OF THE ARID AND SEMI-ARID LANDS

SASAL's Enkang' Model[31] similarly demonstrates that climate resilience cannot be achieved without addressing gender inequality and social norms simultaneously. Rather than treating climate adaptation and gender equality as separate interventions, the model recognizes them as deeply interconnected. By working with communities that are willing to collectively challenge harmful practices while embracing sustainable and gender-equal alternatives. The Enkang' Model creates living examples of transformation that inspire wider social change.

The model also highlights the importance of preserving pastoralist knowledge systems, recognizing that generations of environmental stewardship offer essential lessons for building resilience in a changing climate. The strength lies in the communities that own and sustain these solutions.

Across different geographies, cultures, and ecosystems, young feminist are already designing holistic, community-led responses to climate change. Their work is grounded in care, justice, reciprocity, and lived experiences. **The question, therefore, is no longer whether young feminists have solutions. The question is whether governments, donors, multilateral institutions, and philanthropic actors are willing to invest in them.**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Manifesto is more than the culmination of five years of collective work. It is a testament to the perseverance, imagination, and courage of young, active feminists who chose to remain hopeful while navigating systems that were not designed for them. It is a celebration of the barriers we overcame, the methodologies we created, the communities we built, and the futures we dared to imagine together.

Above all, this Manifesto is an invitation and a political tool for the next generation of young feminists entering multilateral and multi-stakeholder spaces. We hope it serves not only as a resource and guide, but also as a reminder that you do not have to navigate these spaces alone. We hope it offers solidarity, courage, and practical tools to continue advancing feminist climate justice with conviction and care.

This Manifesto would not exist without the generosity of the young feminist leaders who entrusted us with their stories, reflections, and lived experiences. Through feminist participatory action research and autonomous data collection, they documented not only their achievements but also their struggles, uncertainties, and lessons learned. Their willingness to be vulnerable has made this Manifesto an honest reflection of what it means to build feminist leadership in a world facing intersecting crises. We extend our deepest gratitude to Fridays For Future MAPA: Ayshka Najib, Farzana Faruk Jhumu, Fatemah Sultan; Spring of the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (SASAL): Mana Omar and Mercy Nyerere; and Wild Heart Kenya (WHK): Fazeela Mubarak and Husna Khan.

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Finally, this Manifesto belongs to every young feminist who is a leader, who has ever questioned whether they belonged in rooms where decisions are made or have been told they are too young and radical, and yet chose to continue anyway. The methodologies captured in these pages were not just developed in theory; they were forged through practice, solidarity, care, and unwavering commitment to justice.

We hope this Manifesto becomes more than a record of our journey and rather a living document that inspires future young feminists to organize boldly, lead collectively, challenge systems with compassion, and build feminist futures we know are possible.

As feminist organizer Mariam Kaba reminded us: “Hope is a discipline.”
May this Manifesto be one small contribution to that.

In solidarity and care,

Fridays For Future MAPA
Spring of the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
Wild Heart Kenya

young feminist caucus

Designed and illustrated by Maitree Muzumdar.

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Our mission is to challenge the status quo, shift power dynamics, and localise, all in pursuit of institutionalising young feminist leadership.